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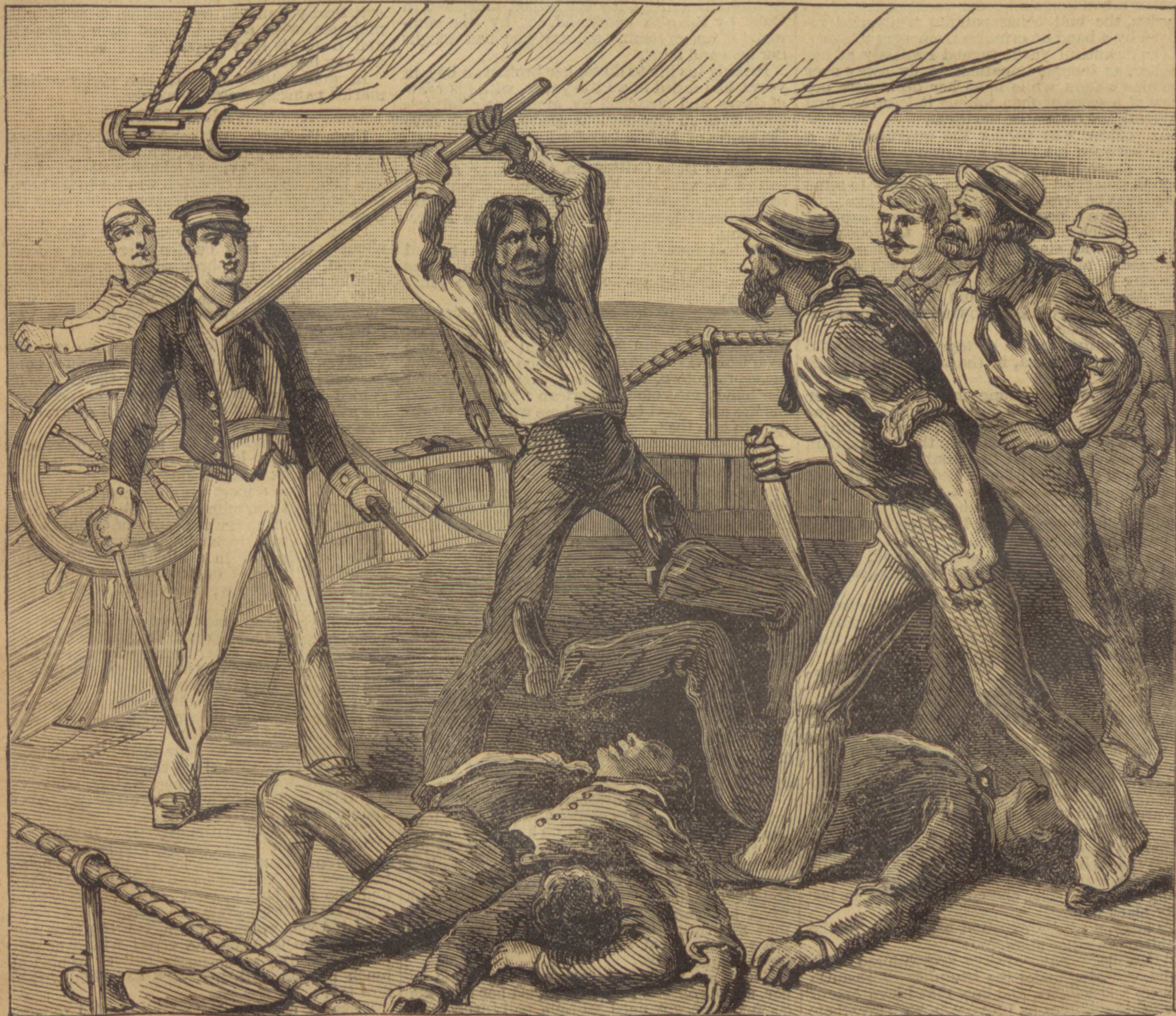
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THE WILD YACHTSMAN; or, THE CRUISE of the WAR-CLOUD.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM,

AUTHOR OF "MERLE THE MUTINEER," "MONTEZUMA, THE MERCILESS," "THE SEA DESPERADO," ETC., ETC., ETC.



WITH A BOUND THE RED-SKIN SAILOR PLACED HIMSELF BY THE SIDE OF THE SWIFT YACHTSMAN'S YOUNG COMMANDER.

The Wild Yachtsman;

OR,

The Cruise of the War-Cloud.

A Companion Story to "Isodor, the Young Conspirator," and "The Boy Insurgent," Being Reminiscences of the Cuban Revolutions.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.

THE BEAUTIFUL REFUGEE.

"Oh, Duke! must I give you up, too?"

The one who uttered the words looked up into the face of the man whom she addressed, with an expression that was pitiful in its sadness.

The two stood upon the piazza of a small cottage house, situated upon the beautiful shores of Mobile Bay, a few miles away from the city of that name.

A full moon was rising in a cloudless sky, and its rays fell full upon their earnest faces.

The house was a pretty one, with an air of comfort akin to luxury about it, and surrounded by beautiful grounds in which were flowers innumerable, orange trees, ornamental hedges and here and there a majestic live-oak.

The grounds led to the smooth white drive that bordered the bay, whose waters cast their spray almost up to it.

An inlet formed a harborage before the cottage, and therein, besides a small sloop-rig pleasure-craft, and several row-boats, lay at anchor a handsome schooner-yacht of sixty tons burden, the hull being painted white, and relieved by a band of crimson from stem to stern.

The beautiful yacht tugged restlessly at her anchor, as though impatient to fly away over the blue waters, while upon her deck were her crew of a score of men taking it leisurely, and enjoying the beauty of the night.

An officer was pacing the quarter-deck, a cigar between his teeth, and ever and anon he would pause and look at the rising moon, as though it carried him back in memory to some scene that he loved to have linger with him.

Amidships a negro, with white-linen cap and apron, which stamped him as the cook or "Doctor" was singing in a clear tenor some plantation melody, at the same time accompanying himself upon the banjo, and when he was thus engaged the hum of conversation among the crew ceased, showing their appreciation of his music.

But to return to the cottage, and those who stood upon the piazza, in the broad halo of the moonlight.

The one was a young man, scarcely over twenty-seven, and his tall, elegant form was clad in a suit of white flannel, a sea uniform, for there were gold bands upon the sleeves, bars upon the shoulders and brass buttons.

A cap of white duck, encircled by a gilt band, and with a gold anchor in a wreath in front, lay upon the veranda railing near, thus leaving his light-brown waving hair free, and it was worn rather long.

His face was fearless, and as frank, cheery and noble in expression, as it was handsome in feature.

The one who had addressed to him the words that open this story, was a maiden of eighteen, with eyes so large, black and expressive that they seemed hardly human.

Her face was darkly bronzed, but the complexion perfect and soft as velvet, the mouth full, with crimson lips, and pearly teeth even and perfect, while her form was a model of graceful symmetry.

Diamonds sparkled in her ears, and two rings, one a large solitaire, the other a blood-red ruby were worn upon the third finger of her left hand, and which was placed lightly upon the arm of the young sailor, as he stood by her side.

She too was dressed in pure white, a soft material that fell in graceful folds about her, while a Spanish scarf, or veil fell upon her shoulders, being fastened to a chased silver comb in her inky black hair.

In answer to the question asked him by the maiden, the sailor answered:

"Estrella, I have always sympathized with Cuba, suffering under the brutality of Spanish officers and soldiers, and now that I love one of her fair daughters, as I love you, with my whole

soul, I am glad to give my aid to her just cause in throwing off the yoke upon her."

"You served your country so nobly and well, Duke, in its late war with Mexico, that I dread your again going into war for fear you may not live through it."

"I have not forgotten how reckless you are, for my parents, my mother and myself, with a score of others, owe our lives to you, for death was staring us in the face when you so fearlessly ran down to our sinking vessel, and that fearful night of storm took us on board your yacht."

"Since that night I have loved you, Duke Crittenden, and do you wonder that I feel a dread to see you ever enlist in the service of my native island, fearing evil to you?"

"Do you wonder that I, who a few months ago suffered the loss of a father, garroted as a Cuban insurgent, saw my mother's heart break under the shock, had my beautiful home laid in ashes, and now, a fugitive in the United States, with my boy-brother already enlisted in Cuba's cause, and with the ban of outlawry and death put upon him by Spain, do you wonder, I say, that I hate to see you too go from me to join in the cruel struggle that must come?"

"Oh, Duke! it is a bitter, bitter blow for me to have you go, and yet, as a true Cuban girl I must give you up, hope for the best, and nurse my sorrow in solitude, while I offer up prayers night and morning for God to keep you and my brother Isodor from harm."

"Go, Duke, I am calm now, and Heaven protect you!"

She had spoken in passionate earnestness, this beautiful Cuban girl, a refugee in a foreign land to her, with only a few faithful slaves about her, and not one near whom she could claim as kindred.

A short distance away, in a little cemetery near the restless waves of the bay, that sung continually a dirge, lay her father, murdered in Cuba by Spanish command, ay, by the command of one of Spain's officers who had sought her love and hand.

Risking his life to do so, her brother, a boy in years, had sailed in a little yacht, with his crew of slaves, and snatched by night their father's body from an ignominious grave, bearing it to the shores of Mobile Bay for burial.

Never would he have escaped, but for the courage of Duke Crittenden, the young American yachtsman, who had been cruising near, and seeing him chased by a Spanish craft, had protected the little vessel because it bore the American flag.

He had found in the youth one whom he had met before, when he saved him, with others from a sinking packet-ship nearly two years previous.

He had heard his sad story and gone to the little refugee home upon the American shores, and meeting again the beautiful Estrella had soon learned to love devotedly one whom he had never forgotten, as she had ever remembered the handsome young American who had risked his life and vessel to serve those who were strangers to him then.

In New Orleans, only a few weeks before the scene of parting upon the piazza of the cottage, Duke Crittenden had resented the insult to young Isodor Christobal, by Spanish officers who sought to get possession of him as a Boy Insurgent, and bear him away to Cuba for execution, for their vessel then lay in port.

A double duel had followed, upon the deck of the yacht Red Belt, and the Spanish Lieutenant De Garmo had fallen at the fire of the young American, while Isodor disarmed his midshipman adversary, and spared his life.

Loving the sister, devoted to the brother, Duke Crittenden, a West Point graduate, a gallant officer in the war with Mexico, a wealthy young planter-yachtsman, had given up his commission and cast his lot with Cuba, being made a colonel in the command that the Insurgent Chief, General Narciso Lopez, was then organizing to land upon the coast of the Ever Faithful Isle to raise the standard of revolt against Spain.

With Isodor, her brother, then away upon secret service for the cause, and Duke Crittenden, her lover, about to sail on a dangerous expedition, her mother and father lying side by side in the little cemetery near, and to be left alone in her grief, it was no wonder that Estrella Christobal felt a dread of coming evil, and when her handsome lover bade her farewell, that she threw herself down upon the velvet grass of the lawn and sobbed as though her heart would break.

There her mulatto maid, Buenita, came to her, spoke consoling words, and led her into the cottage; but not until Estrella had turned and

cast one long look upon the white sails of the Red Belt, flying swiftly toward the Gulf, bound upon her mission of desperate peril.

CHAPTER II.

ON BOARD THE WAR-CLOUD.

In the beautiful harbor of Pensacola there lay at anchor, in the fall of 1850, the time of which I write, a craft that had attracted universal attention among landmen as well as seamen.

She was modeled as gracefully as a swan, had good depth, was razor-like forward, lean in stern, and carried masts that towered to a vast height and which were rather bowed forward than raking, which latter was at that time considered the thing for all rakish-looking vessels.

Her spars were very long and slender, there was great width between the masts which enabled her to spread a large foresail; her top-masts were remarkable in their length, giving her the chance to put a field of canvas aloft, and her bowsprit ran out like a needle many feet over her bows.

The shape of her hull caused her to present the least possible resistance to the water, while her high bulwarks would ward off heavy seas.

Aft there was a poop-deck, forming the cabin, which was large and furnished neatly and with every comfort.

Her space between decks was roomy, and no crew could complain of their quarters there.

She had been launched but a few days and she was in perfect trim, her sails being snowy white, her spars glistening like silver, and the brass work about her appearing like pure gold.

She was fitted with every convenience that could possibly be needed, and altogether was as trim and beautiful a little schooner as ever had been seen in American waters.

One oddity about her was that her name was illustrated upon her stern, for it had been most artistically painted, representing a wild midnight sea, with a black cloud flying above it, and from its inky depths were issuing vivid, darting lightning.

In gold letters beneath this really artistic marine painting were the words:

"WAR-CLOUD."

Upon the boats and oar-blades the name was also painted in gilt letters, while the figure-head was the strange device of a huge cutlass, grasped in a hand, the arm of which was set in the bows, the blade pointing ahead upon a line with the bowsprit.

Upon the deck of the pretty yacht, which was about seventy tons burden, were half a dozen seamen, with darkly-bronzed faces, and simply a sailor garb belonging to no particular nationality, which seemed the case also with the men themselves, for they were by no means a prepossessing lot.

"Well, my young captain, how do you like your vessel?" asked a stout, red-faced man, coming out of the cabin of the War-Cloud, accompanied by a youth of seventeen, who possessed the athletic form of a man, yet was as graceful as a woman in his movements.

His face was a study, for seldom countenance so young wore look so stern, while with it mingled a look inexpressibly sad.

Still it was a most winning face, one to command respect and admiration, love and fear, as it was perfect as far as beauty of outline went, and fearless to a tinge of recklessness.

He was dressed in a blue flannel suit, ornamented with brass buttons, and wore a naval cap of Panama straw, on the front of which was a gold anchor.

The dark face, black eyes and hair of the youth indicated his Spanish origin, for he was a Cuban, and none other than Isodor Christobal, the brother of the beautiful refugee dwelling in the cottage home upon Mobile bay.

"I am more than pleased with her, senor," answered the young Cuban, addressing the stout man, who was her builder.

"I stuck square to your model, and if I say so myself, have turned out the prettiest bit of a craft that was ever in these waters, while, on the trial trip we took her the other day, when your friend, I forget his name—"

"Captain Duke Crittenden," said Isodor.

"Yes, when your friend, Captain Crittenden, brought you here in his yacht, you remember how she walked away from his Red Belt, and she not half in trim either, as she is now, while his craft is as fast as a bird."

"I tell you, young captain, you've got a gem in the War-Cloud that no vessel will ever surpass," and the enthusiastic builder seemed as much pleased with his work as a child with a new toy.

"She is perfect, sir, and I am glad to have

paid you the sum agreed upon; but I wish I had my own crew with me to carry her to New Orleans, for which port I shall sail, though I suppose the men now on board will do for the run."

"They shipped as first-class seamen, sir, and you remember, in our race with the Red Belt last week, handled her well?"

"Yes, I do not doubt their seamanship; but I do not like their looks, for they strike me as a hard set."

"But it will be but for a short run, and so I will have to stand them. Can you suggest any of them to act as officers?"

"There are two I think will do, and they profess to have been mates on sailing-vessels, and may tell the truth about it; but, as you say, I don't like the looks of any of them."

"How many are there, all told?"

"Thirteen."

"You Americans call that an unlucky number?"

"Yes, we do so think; but two will be officers, one a cook, and ten seamen, while you will make fourteen, so that there will not be thirteen that sail on the yacht, sir; and, if there were, I confess I am superstitious enough to have you discharge one, or ship another hand."

"Some of them are Spaniards, are they not?"

"They claim to be West Indians, Irish, English, Americans, Germans, and I believe there is a half-breed Indian among them, and a negro; but you'll have no trouble with them, for what would they gain, as the yacht carries no valuables, and they will be in hopes of continuing as her crew when you reach New Orleans."

"All right, sir; such as they are, I accept them, so will select the two men who are to act as mates, and set sail to-night," and two hours after the War-Cloud was leaving Pensacola at a rapid pace, and wading out into the blue waters of the Gulf of Mexico, her boy captain at her helm, and the crew that he was suspicious of at their posts, and proving themselves thorough sailors.

CHAPTER III.

THE SPANISH SPY.

It was a great temptation to Isodor Christobal after he had left the harbor of Pensacola, to put his helm aport and head for Mobile Bay, that he might show his new vessel to his sister, but not wishing to attract any attention to her more than was necessary, he headed for the mouth of the Mississippi.

When he reached New Orleans it was his intention to run over to his home and take his negro crew back with him to man the War-Cloud, as he had perfect confidence in their skill and courage.

Upon the yacht he had had in Cuba, when living at Villa Vista Plantation upon the coast, and which he had wrecked to prevent the Spaniards from capturing, he had drilled his half-dozen negro sailors to understand thoroughly all that was needed of them, and they had proven themselves true as steel.

Bueno, his faithful servant and friend, and an American negro, whom Don Christobal had purchased in Havana, was a good sailor and navigator as well, and Isodor regretted that he had not brought him with him, to aid in running the yacht to New Orleans.

Having purchased the home on the bay for his sister, and placed a certain sum at interest for her, which his father had thoughtfully sent into the United States before the crash came, Isodor had invested all else in the building of the War-Cloud, and with it and the cause of Cuba he must sink or swim he well knew.

Should Cuba become free, he knew well that his sister and himself would be very rich, for the Don had owned vast estates there; but if not, the world was before him to struggle for a fortune as best he could.

He had offered his services to the Secret Council in New Orleans, known as the Cuban Junta, and they had accepted them gladly, knowing well his worth, and his duties were to be running arms, munitions of war, stores, and, if need be, volunteer troops into Cuba.

He knew well the dangers of such an enterprise.

He knew that he had to elude the alert naval authorities of the United States, who had captured General Lopez on a former occasion, and whose duty it was to prevent the neutrality laws from being broken.

He was well aware that should he be taken by the Spaniards he would be quickly led to the garrote, or swung off at the yard-arm of the cruiser capturing him.

But he had seen his father led to the garrote

and put to death, he had told his mother the fateful story of what he had gazed upon, and beheld her die under the shock; he had seen his own beautiful home in ashes, and amid the ruins he had knelt and registered a vow of vengeance.

Such were the thoughts that crowded upon the heart and brain of the Boy Insurgent, as he stood upon the deck of his yacht, while she sped gaily along over the moonlit sea. He had relinquished the helm to one of the two men, whom he had appointed to act as officers, as soon as he felt how beautifully she behaved under a touch upon the tiller.

Then he entered the cabin and sat down to his lonely supper, which the negro cook had prepared for him.

The wind was light, but steady, and the War-Cloud bowled merrily along, making five knots out of a breeze which few crafts could have gotten over three out of.

"I shall run into the Delta of the Mississippi to-morrow afternoon some time, if this wind increases a little," said Isodor musingly, as he sat at his supper.

Above his head, looking down upon him, was one of the officers he had chosen.

The moonlight fell full upon the man's face, and showed it to be full of a certain fiendish triumph.

After seeing that Isodor was not likely to come upon deck for some little while, he turned to the other mate who held the wheel and said:

"Boreas, I asked you to ship with me on this craft as a little speculation."

"Yes," was the answer in an inquiring way.

"I am a little more than you give me credit for, as I intend to show you."

"I am a good listener, shipmate Binnacle."

"We are the only two Americans on the craft, and four of the gang forward I can count on, as you know, so what have you done with the others?"

"I have talked with all of them, and am sure of the nigger, the Injun and three of the Diegos."

"You mean the Spaniards?"

"The Spanish-speaking fellows, be they Cubans, Spaniards or Mexicans, for I can't tell which, and I don't believe they know."

"Well, that makes your five, my four and ourselves, which count up to eleven, and if the other two don't join in, overboard they go, so that will settle it."

"But what would you do, Binnacle?"

"Seize the yacht."

"These are not times to turn pirate in, Binnacle."

"I hain't no fool, Boreas, as you ought to know," was the sullen remark.

"If you seize the yacht you make a pirate of yourself."

"I don't do no such thing."

"I say yes."

"You don't know, Bory, for I'm acting under orders."

"Oh!"

"I knows what I'm about."

"I wish you'd tell me, for I don't want to put my neck in a rope unless I know what it's for."

"I am a spy, Bory."

"A spy?" asked the other, with surprise.

"Fact."

"Who are you spying on?"

"This yacht."

"Who for?"

The man, whom his shipmate had called Binnacle, stepped to the companionway and glanced down into the cabin.

Then he came back to his companion, and said:

"Boreas, I've got a great head on me."

"You have, for a fact."

"I saw this yacht being built, and I saw that the owner was a Cuban."

"Yes."

"I had seen about a Cuban boy doing certain wonders in the uprising in the island, and his name being a strange one, I fastened it in my mind."

"When I heard the name of this youth, I discovered that it was the same, and knew him to be the lad who had been making a hero of himself in Cuba; so I put this and that together, and concluded that this yacht was being built for a Cuban blockade-runner."

"What is that?"

"To carry arms, ammunition and men into Cuba for another revolution."

"You may be right, Binnacle."

"I know I am right, for though General Lopez and his fellow-Cubans were captured by a United States cruiser before they reached Cuba, and were brought back to this country,

they did not give up hope, and have been working like beavers to get off another expedition to the island."

"You don't say so, Bin?"

"I do say so, and I know it."

"Now, my sympathy would be with Cuba, if it wasn't with myself, and being in hard luck just now, I am feeling more interest in Binnacle than in Cubans, so I have acted accordingly."

"What have you done?"

"I just went to New Orleans, saw the Spanish consul there, told him that I knew where a craft was being built to run arms into Cuba, and that it was to be commanded by Isodor Christobal, the Boy Insurgent."

"What did he do?"

"Do? Why he just grasped my hand, held out half a dozen gold eagles, and told me that he would give five thousand dollars for the capture of the youth, and as much more for the yacht."

"That was square."

"It was tip-top, and he gave me more gold, told me to write him, so as to post him, and that he would send me a little cash now and then to keep my eyes open as a Spanish spy."

"Well, Binnacle, you've doubtless posted him?"

"You may bet I have, and I've got Spanish papers, to make me square with the authorities in Cuba, and I just took the idea that I would ship on the yacht, get a crew to my liking, for I knew she wanted men, as I've kept friendly with the builder, and then seize her upon the Gulf and run her into Havana."

"But she carries the United States flag, shipmate."

"I don't care about that, for I shall run her in by night, turn her over to a cruiser, and you may swear that she'll be put down as lost at sea, going down with all on board on her first cruise, while the Spaniards will soon change her rig, so that her builder won't know her."

"But the Boy Captain?"

"Oh, he'll be garroted quietly."

"It's pretty hard for him."

"Yes, as he's a clever fellow; but I'm in Spanish service, you know, so must not let a Cuban Insurgent escape through sympathy for him."

"That's so."

"Then I'm to get a trifle over ten thousand, and I'll give you a couple of thousand and five hundred apiece to our mates, so that will keep their mouths shut and make all things even."

"I'm in for it, Binnacle, tooth and nail, from keel to truck; so when do you set to work?"

"I'll tell you my little plan, Boreas."

"I'm all ears."

"The young captain is to come on deck at eight to take the first watch, as you heard him say, and I'm to take the second."

"Yes."

"While he's here, I'll fasten the door of the gangway, leading forward, so that he cannot open it, and when he goes below at eight bells, we'll close the companionway upon him, and there keep him a prisoner until we run into Havana, for the Spanish consul said the Boy Insurgent must be taken alive."

"I'm glad we won't have to kill him."

"So am I, for I never saw a young fellow of his years that had more sailor in him, or was as much of a man."

"He's game too, and would fight to the death if we had to face him, so I want none of that."

"Nor I, so it's a go," was the remark of Boreas, and Binnacle sauntered forward to bring his plot to a head with the crew.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MUTINY.

WHEN the man Binnacle went forward among the crew of the War-Cloud, he proved himself an adept in entering into a plot.

He called first to the Indian to approach him.

This man was a perfect Hercules in build, and had a face that might have been carved out of stone, for all the expression there was in it.

He kept his eyes constantly looking down, but, if he raised them in his quick way, they seemed fairly to blaze and one had the impression that they looked into the depths of his heart.

He had been known for some time, about Pensacola, as a sailor who never took a second voyage on the same ship, though he was a most thorough seaman, and not one of his captains had ever found any fault with him.

Though a full-blooded Indian of the Seminole tribe, he yet bore the name of Half-breed, and by no other was he known, or seemed to care to be.

"Half-breed, I want to talk with you," said Mate Binnacle quietly.

"You talk, me hear," was the response.

"I can get plenty of gold if I take this vessel into Havana, and sell her there."

"Who buy?"

"The Spanish captain-general."

"Ugh!"

"He will give a good price for the vessel, and gold for the young chief now on board."

"Good!"

"Will you help us to take the vessel and get some of the gold?"

"Want to kill young chief?"

"No, we will leave him to the captain-general."

"He kill young chief?"

"Only too quick."

"Good! how much gold Half-breed get?"

"The same as the rest of the crew—say, five hundred dollars."

"Good!"

"You will help?"

"Me help," was the laconic reply, and Binnacle walked on forward, leaving the Indian, who always kept aloof from his shipmates, standing in the waist, leaning over the bulwarks.

The moment that the mate walked forward among the men, the Indian turned, and dropped down the open hatch to the deck below.

A battle lantern swung there, giving a dim light, and revealing the hammocks of the crew here and there.

Passing quickly aft, the Indian opened a door in a bulkhead and passed into a dark gangway.

A ray of light came from beyond, and a second door was ajar, and it led into the cabin, by ascending several steps.

It was a stout door, heavily studded with nails, and had evidently been left open for the circulation of air through the vessel.

The cabin lamp revealed Isodor seated at the table, his supper having been disposed of, and toying with his spoon, while his thoughts seemed far away.

The cabin was large, and well furnished, without any effort at luxury, and there was a stateroom upon either side of the gangway door where the Indian stood.

A low whistle caused Isodor to start, and a second one directed his eyes in the direction whence the sound came.

He saw the heavy door move slightly and then in the open space the face of the Indian appeared.

Instantly Isodor arose, for the red hand of Half-breed beckoned to him, and at the same time seemed to give him a warning.

"Sh! Let young sea chief stand there and hear Half-breed," said the Indian, and Isodor stopped by the door.

"Bad pale-face want sell ship to Spaniard in Havana."

"Sell young sea chief too, so get kill there, and get gold for him and ship."

"Half-breed only friend of young sea chief; he go on deck and wait and see what bad pale-face do; but Half-breed his friend."

Without another word the Indian glided away as silently as he had come, and regained the deck unseen, being listlessly leaning over the bulwarks in the waist, when Binnacle came aft again.

In the mean time, aroused by the words of the Indian, and not doubting for an instant his story for he had read well the faces of the crew, Isodor quickly buckled on his belt, containing a revolver, and to which was hung a cutlass with diamond-studded hilt and a gold scabbard, on which was an inscription that it had been presented by Spaniards to me, Captain Atares of the Spanish army, for his having promptly put down a revolt by the execution of a number of Cubans.

This sword had in truth been presented for a butchery of Cubans, rather than an execution, and the one who had received it was known as "Captain Atares the Butcher," and from him upon the field had Isodor taken the valuable weapon which was worth a small fortune, and bore the name known as the "Diamond Cutlass."

It was a superb blade of Damascus steel, had already served Isodor well in need, and he buckled it on with the air of one who meant to use it if need be.

Going on deck, having thrown a cloak over his shoulders, the youth took his stand behind Mate Boreas, who still had the wheel, while some distance off stood Binnacle conversing with a negro sailor, who seemed to listen most attentively to what he was saying.

The Indian still remained in the waist, and the other men were grouped forward.

The wind had freshened a little, since the moon rose, and the War-Cloud was skimming along at a pace that won the admiration of all.

"Captain, do you take the deck now?" asked Binnacle coming forward.

"Yes," was the abrupt reply.

"And I shall relieve you at eight bells."

"No, sir, you will do nothing of the kind, for I shall hold the deck until we reach Mobile, for which port I shall at once head."

"Put her about, helmsman, and steer for Mobile!" and Isodor spoke in a voice that rung out in dead earnest.

"What does this mean?" cried Binnacle in a loud voice, and at his loud tones the men forward came aft with a rush.

"It means, sir, that I command this vessel, and that you are hired to obey my orders, and if you refuse, I shall shoot you down without one atom of mercy!"

As Isodor spoke he threw off his cloak, and stood revealed with his Diamond Cutlass in one hand and a revolver in the other.

It was a thrilling scene, that Cuban boy there at bay upon his yacht's deck, fearlessly defying the mutineers that surrounded him.

Just behind the wild lot of desperate men who faced the boy, stood the Indian sailor, one hand upon the knife in his belt, the other grasping a capstan bar which he had seized and brought aft with him.

"Say, captain, hain't this a little rough on a faithful crew?" said Binnacle deprecatingly.

"No, it is to save my life and vessel that I act, and the man who refuses to obey me will never enjoy the gold he hoped to sell me for."

"Get forward all of you!"

The men stood undecided, and Binnacle shouted:

"Rush on him, men! he's but a boy!"

In a mass they started, one to fall with a crushed skull, as the Indian brought the capstan down upon it, and then with a bound the red-skin sailor placed himself by the side of the swift yacht's young commander.

The yacht ran up into the wind and lay to; there were two sharp reports, and two men fell under the fire of the boy, one dead, the other with a broken leg, and then the others were upon him and his red ally, and ere further execution could be done, Isodor and the Indian were thrown by mere force of numbers down the companionway into the cabin.

Instantly it was closed upon them, while Binnacle called out:

"Down below, some of you, and bar the cabin gangway door!"

Several men bounded away, and then came the words:

"He killed two and wounded one, so overboard with them for dead men tell no tales, and there will be three less to divide the gold with!"

The wounded man uttered a shriek of wild despair, as his comrades seized him to carry out the order of their ringleader; but the mutineers were merciless now, and into the sea the two dead men and one living one, his leg shattered by a bullet, were thrown, the wail of the poor wretch being cut short by the waters that swept over him.

"I am master here now, and Boreas, you are my first luff, so get the schooner under way again, and you men, all but two of you, go to your posts!"

The men obeyed, while the two ordered to remain were placed, one at the gangway door, below, the other at the companionway, and ordered to shoot the youth or Indian, should they attempt to dash out, before they could be nailed up securely as prisoners in the cabin.

"I shall give the Indian traitor up too, and ask the captain-general to garrote him as a special favor to me, Boreas," said Binnacle.

"He ought to be; but did you ever see anything more game than that youth?"

"I told you that he was game clean through; but he has done us a favor in getting rid of two of the fellows, and the Indian has helped in siding with him, and killing Corbett as he did, for it leaves more gold to go round."

"So it does; but hain't that a sail yonder?"

"It is, for a fact; and we must get away from here, for if a cruiser ran on us it would be a dark day for us;" and the War-Cloud was quickly headed away on her course to Havana.

But the strange sail, a little over a mile distant, changed her course also, and it at once resolved itself into a chase.

CHAPTER V.

THE STRANGE SAIL.

"MR. FIELD, there's a craft behaving a little strange."

"She backs and fills so, sir, I cannot make her out."

The speakers were Captain Duke Crittenden and his sailing-master, Melton Field.

The two stood on the quarter-deck of the Red Belt, which was gliding slowly along over the waters of the Gulf of Mexico, for the wind was light, and the schooner did not have her topsails set.

It was bright moonlight, and the night after the sad parting of the gallant young yachtman with Estrella Christobal at her home by the waters of Mobile Bay.

The yacht had been cruising about the Gulf since leaving the bay, with some evident purpose in view that kept her within a certain radius.

The hours had passed away, day had come and gone, and night had once more settled upon the sea, in all the moonlight beauty of that Southern latitude.

The Red Belt, and the strange sail that her captain had sighted had both gotten strangely near to each other without either one having been sighted, but the moment that the young yachtman had come on deck, his quick eyes had fallen upon the craft not very far distant.

The past hour he and Melton Field had been in the cabin, eating supper and chatting together, and the deck had been in charge of an under officer, whom the captain reprimanded with:

"Dorsey, you know that we are looking for a craft to bring us important tidings, and here you run almost upon a strange vessel and do not see her."

"I'm afraid I was half-asleep, Captain Crittenden, without knowing it, for you know we've lost a great deal of rest of late," was the frank response.

"I know it, Dorsey, and I do not blame you, as we are not likely to be picked up by a Spaniard here—but!" and Crittenden paused, seized his glass and bent it upon the strange sail, while he cried:

"That is Isodor's yacht, as I live!"

"The one we had the run with out at Pensacola, and which walked away so cleverly from the Red Belt, sir?"

"Yes, Field, the same, and I'll wager it is she."

"It certainly is, sir."

"But what the mischief is the matter with her, for since we came on deck she has been backing and filling there as though no one was upon her."

"Ha! she goes about now, and stands away from us."

"Yes, sir; and they are crowding sail upon her," cried Dorsey.

"We will do the same on the Red Belt, and if she can show us a clean pair of heels in this breeze, which is our yacht's best hold."

"All hands ahoy!"

"Ay, ay, sir," came in a chorus from the crew, and they sprung to their work with alacrity, when Crittenden ordered, in his cheery, clear voice:

"Put the yacht's best bib and tucker on her, lads, for she has work to do."

In a few minutes the Red Belt was one mass of canvas, and flying along at a pace that was very fast considering the light wind.

"She gains on us, sir," cried Melton Fields anxiously.

"So she does; no, I think not."

"I'll take an object on her and see if she does, for somehow I do not believe it, as the Belt is slipping along as fast as this breeze can drive wood through water," and Captain Crittenden fixed his eye upon the man at the wheel on the schooner ahead, regarded him attentively for an instant, to see just how distinctly he could make him out, and then turned his back upon the craft.

"Now, Melton, I do not understand this strange caper, for Isodor Christobal knows this craft as he does his own face, and more, expects me to be in these waters about this time."

"It is strange, sir, for he is too good a sailor not to recognize the Red Belt in this moonlight."

"Then she was certainly not under way when we came out of the cabin and sighted her and was acting very strangely, as though no one was at her helm."

"That is true, sir; she seemed to be adrift, and yet there are men upon her deck, and she is running from us."

"Yes, and under all the sail she can set, so it shows that she is running from us with every effort to part company."

"So it does; but I think there is no doubt about her being the War-Cloud."

"No more doubt than that this is the Red Belt."

"Isodor was to go this week to Pensacola."

after his yacht, and you know that port lies off yonder not many leagues away.

"Now, Field, I know that Isodor did not intend to take his black crew after the yacht, and was to go alone, and in these times of Spanish trickery, I fear that he has gotten into trouble, so I shall run that craft down if I have to carry the sticks out of the Red Belt to do so."

"I would do so, sir, as we may get the young gentleman out of a scrape; but what about the schooner with Cuban patriots on board that we were to meet here?"

"She must wait about here until we return, for she dare not put back into any port, and of course her skipper does not know where to land them, for it was to keep that secret that I suggested taking the men off in mid sea and running them to the island retreat myself."

"Now to see if we have gained any on the chase," and Crittenden turned once more to have a look upon the schooner.

As before he fixed his eye upon the helmsman, and in an instant cried out joyfully:

"Bravo! we are gaining well!"

"I thought that the Red Belt could not be run away from in her own wind, even though yonder craft did show her heels too cleanly in the blow we had that day."

"I can see the movement of the helmsman's arms now, Field, which I could not do before."

"Get the hose out and throw water on the sails, and that will drag her along a little faster."

"Steady at the wheel, Dorsey, and don't let her lose an inch from bad steering."

The sails were now wet thoroughly, the yacht was trimmed to a nicety, two men were put at the wheel, every halyard was hauled taut, every sail trimmed flat, and not a thing left undone that could add to the increased speed of the Red Belt, which all could now see was certainly gaining upon the War-Cloud.

CHAPTER VI.

ISODOR'S STRATEGY.

WHEN the mutineers threw Isodor and the Indian down the companionway, into the cabin of the War-Cloud, they were not aware that they had had any assistance in doing so from one of the two they thus sought to get rid of.

That one was Half-breed who, after killing one of the mutineers with his capstan bar had sprung to the side of Isodor, and made an effort to keep off the mutineers.

Seeing that this was impossible, and that they were determined to kill him, but would not fire upon the youth, as though they wished to take him alive, he had shoved Isodor down the companionway, after the two shots, and sprung after him so closely, that it looked as though they had been thrown together into the cabin.

Had the mutineers followed them, the struggle that would have followed would have been desperate in the extreme; but, Binnacle had accomplished his purpose, in getting Isodor into the cabin, and though the Indian sailor was there also he must let matters rest as they were.

He had no dread that the two would break out, and gain the mastery of himself and men, so he contented himself by securing the gangway door and companionway, and then set to work to run away from the strange sail they had come so near to without sighting.

With perfect confidence in the speed of the War-Cloud, from what he had seen her do, he had no doubt but she would soon drop the trim craft astern of her, and that he could safely reach Havana with his prize and prisoners.

In the mean time, Isodor had risen from his fall, desperately determined to fight to the death, for he had no idea that he was to be held a prisoner and not slain.

The Indian sailor also arose and stood by his side, having grasped a chair as a weapon of defense.

Then, for an instant they stood, until they discovered that they were to be nailed up within the cabin.

"Well, this is just what I dreaded, and but for you, my noble fellow, I would have been quickly slain," and Isodor held forth his hand, which the Seminole grasped most warmly, while a smile crossed his stolid face.

"What is to be done now, chief?" asked Isodor quietly.

"Sail out yonder," said the Indian, pointing out of the stern ports.

"Indeed?"

"Yes, we see him before fight come: he see us, and come."

Isodor stepped to the cabin ports and looked out.

The schooner was just bearing around to run from the Red Belt, and no sail was in sight from her cabin; but a moment after, as she

got under headway, Isodor's eyes fell upon the schooner, and an exclamation of joy broke from his lips.

Instantly the Indian stepped to his side.

"What is your name?" asked Isodor, quickly.

"Half-breed."

"No, I do not wish to call you by a name that is insulting."

"Me Seminole chief."

"Then I will call you Seminole then."

"Good! me call you chief."

"Well, Seminole, I know that craft."

"Know him?"

"Yes, her chief is my friend, and see, he is in chase!"

"Yes, but can't catch."

"Why?"

"Cloud fly too fast."

"That is true; this craft is too fast even for the Red Belt," and Isodor regretted then that his beautiful yacht had such speed.

"She walk 'way from him," said Seminole quickly, as he watched the Red Belt.

"That is true, and— Ha! I have an idea."

"Tell him."

"There are some heavy cables in one of those state-rooms, which have not been carried forward."

"Ugh!"

"We will get one."

"What do?"

"I will show you, Seminole. Come, help me to get the end of one."

The two entered the front state-room, which, not being needed, had not been arranged for sleeping in yet, with bedding, and was used as a kind of store-room for numerous articles that had not yet been put in the places where they belonged.

Among these things were a couple of small boat anchors, oars, coils of cable and ropes, and upon these Isodor gazed thoughtfully for a moment.

Then he said:

"Two of those oars will support one of these boat anchors, and I will tie it upon them."

Having done this, he fastened a rope to one end of the oars, and spliced it securely to the end of a large cable.

This drag was then carried to the starboard port and leaning far out Isodor looked up on deck.

He just saw the head of the helmsman, so said:

"Now lower away!"

The drag was gently lowered from the stern port into the water.

There was a splash or two, which sounded very loud to the ears of the Indian or Isodor, but seemed not to be heard upon the deck of the War-Cloud, or if heard was unnoticed, it being caused by the washing of the waters in the vessel's wake.

Down it sunk, then the cable was payed out noiselessly and rapidly, to get the drag as far away from the schooner as possible.

After having payed out as much as he thought necessary, Isodor told the Indian to cut it in two with his sharp knife, and it was made fast to about ten fathom of small rope that would not attract the eye of any one glancing astern from the deck as quickly as would the large cable.

"Young chief big smart; don't sail so fast now," said the Seminole, as his quick eye told him that the Red Belt was gaining through Isodor's ingenious plan.

"Yes, this retards her a knot an hour fully, and if they do not discover our little plot we are all right."

"Hark! they see that the Red Belt is gaining, and they are setting extra sail, though they have little more that they can spread," said Isodor, and the sounds overhead indicated that the mutineers were getting alarmed at the yacht astern creeping up on them as she was.

The extra sail made a slight difference, but the Red Belt still gained.

Then was heard an order to throw water upon the sails, and this Isodor saw held the two vessels at an equal speed of sailing.

"We must risk more cable, Seminole."

"Yes, that's 'um."

Then the cut end of the cable was quickly lowered from the stern post and fifteen fathoms run out, which took it all.

To the end of this a wire, which Isodor found in the state-room, was made fast, and seeing that it would be impossible for any one on deck to see it, the wire was made fast to the cable with the drag, and it was also let out fifty feet.

"Now the Red Belt gains again," said Isodor.

"Yes; but War-Cloud mighty fast."

"She is, indeed, and if the wind increased in strength to send her along a few knots faster,

she could run away from the Red Belt, fast as she is, even with these drags on," said Isodor, with enthusiasm at the speed of his vessel, though but for the drags she would be carrying him to his doom.

"Fool bad men on deck heap funny," the Indian remarked, with a chuckle of delight, as he heard the exertions of the crew above to urge the War-Cloud still faster ahead, for they also saw plainly that their enemy was gaining upon them, and were anxious about the result.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TWO YACHTS.

THE excitement on the deck of the War-Cloud, among the mutineers, was becoming intense, as they saw that the Red Belt was steadily overhauling them.

They now recognized the yacht, which had raced with the War-Cloud, off Pensacola, on the trial trip of the new craft, for they had been the crew which the builder then had on board.

Binnacle saw that the Red Belt must overhail him within another hour, and he could not exactly understand it, and was at his wits' end to escape what must follow.

"I cannot understand it, Boreas," he said anxiously.

"This craft walked right away from yonder schooner, and on her trial trip, when we were not in half as good trim as we are now."

"It was blowing a twelve-knot breeze then, and she doubtless sails better in rough water and a hard wind."

"But, the wind died out toward evening, if you remember, and when we sailed up to Pensacola it was not blowing any harder than it is now, and there was no sea in the harbor."

"That's so, Binnacle."

"And the War-Cloud walked away from her just as easy then, as she did in rough water and a blow."

"True: how do you make it out?"

"I cannot understand it."

"Nor I."

"Well, what's to be done, Boreas?"

"Don't know: do you?"

Binnacle was silent a few minutes, and then said:

"I have it."

"Well?"

"I will let the yacht yonder run alongside."

"You can't help it."

"I will, at any rate, if she runs near and hails, lay to, and go on board in a boat, before he can send his boat aboard of us."

"Yes."

"Then I will tell him that we were not running from him, but simply sailing on our way, without knowing he was in chase."

"But we set sail when we saw him do so."

"I'll tell him that was to try our speed with him."

"But he'll ask about the Boy Captain?"

"Then I'll tell him the Boy Captain could not come to Pensacola after his craft, so the builder put me on board with a crew to run her to New Orleans for him."

"But this is not the course to New Orleans."

"Then I'll say we were putting her upon her best sailing points, to try her speed, and intending to stand well out into the Gulf, as the builder told me there was no hurry in getting her to port."

"But he saw how we were backing and filling, at the time of the fight, when nobody was at the helm."

"Boreas, you would provoke a saint," impatiently said Binnacle.

"I am merely giving you points you may be questioned on, so that you'll not be taken off your guard."

"That's so; now what shall I say about this other matter?"

"Say that the tiller ropes broke, and we were mending them."

"Boreas, you are a friend in need; now all is arranged, and I must post the crew."

"If you have that young captain, of yonder yacht, to deal with, Binnacle, go slow and with care, for he's as smart a fellow as you would wish to meet."

"I know it, Boreas, or he belies his looks."

"But the yacht comes bravely on, and another half-hour will settle it," and Binnacle went forward among the men.

In a quarter of an hour he returned to find that the Red Belt was steadily gaining, and was beginning to work up to windward of the War-Cloud.

"Better hail her soon, so you'll have plenty of time to lay to, if he asks it," said Boreas.

"Yes; but I've half a mind to fight him, if he shows his teeth," Binnacle rejoined.

"We've got but seven men besides ourselves."
 "And he's got perhaps double as many; but there is a case of muskets in the hold, and a bundle of cutlasses, with a few belts of revolvers, which the youth had brought on board from a Jew's shop where he bought them."

"Firearms and swords are not dangerous, Binnacle, without hands to handle them."

"If we get in a first fire, and surprise them, we will have the advantage, and then, instead of lying to, we will lay alongside and board the yacht, and my word for it we'll win."

"Binnacle, don't make pirates of us."

"We've got our hands in the lion's mouth as it is, and we've got to get it out some way—Ha! he hails!"

The Red Belt was now not more than a cable's length away, and some sixty feet to windward, and steadily gaining.

As Binnacle spoke, like bugle-notes, there came across the moonlit waters:

"War-Cloud, ahoy!"

"Ahoy, the Red Belt!" answered Binnacle calmly.

"What are you running away from me for?"

"We saw you coming, sir, and recognizing the Red Belt, as the craft we sailed with on our trial trip we concluded to give you a race."

"Aha! where is Captain Christobal?"

"He could not come after his yacht, sir, so we were sent with her to run her to New Orleans."

"I have been wrong after all, Field," said Crittenden; but Melton Field remarked quickly:

"Ask him what was the matter with the schooner when we sighted her, for some of the men say they heard pistol-shots on board?"

"Ha! say you so?" and raising his voice again Duke Crittenden called out:

"What was the matter with you, awhile since, that you had no man at the wheel?"

"We broke our rudder ropes, sir, and were fixing them."

"Ahoy, the Red Belt!" suddenly rung out clear and startling from the stern port of the War-Cloud.

Before Crittenden could respond, came the words:

"Ho, Captain Crittenden, this yacht is in the hands of mutineers, and I am a prisoner in my own cabin!"

A yell broke from the crew of the War-Cloud at this *expose*, while Binnacle, with a bitter oath cried:

"My God! I forgot the boy wholly."

"But I'll kill him, if it is the last act of my life."

"Ho, lads, we've got to fight this out, for our necks are in the noose."

"Bring those arms, quick! and, Boreas, hold her on her way, and do not let him board if you can help it!"

The mutineers knew their danger and sprung to work with a will, while a cheer broke from the crew of the Red Belt, and Duke Crittenden thundered forth:

"Lay her aboard yonder craft, helmsman, and you, lads, get your weapons and follow me on her decks!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A FIGHT FOR LIFE.

WHILE the conversation, recorded in the foregoing chapter, was going on, between the young captain of the Red Belt and the mutineer leader on board the War-Cloud, the former vessel had forged ahead until she was in a position to hold the latter at an advantage.

The bowsprit was about even with the mainmast of the War-Cloud and being some sixty feet only to windward, she had the power to run her aboard as she pleased, unless something unforeseen allowed the mutineers to keep out of the way, such as a puff of wind which their foes did not get.

Though a peaceable yacht, Crittenden had obtained permission to carry on board two small brass six-pounders, along with muskets and cutlasses to the number of two dozen, while his fowling-pieces, revolvers, and his belt of arms which he had had as a soldier, enabled him to arm his craft and crew pretty thoroughly.

In a couple of minutes the crew of the Red Belt were armed, Crittenden and Field had dashed into the cabin and gotten their weapons, and the helmsman, under the orders of his commander, was heading down to lay the War-Cloud aboard.

Binnacle was driven to desperation by the fact of his being betrayed, and rallied his desperadoes about him to resist, for he hoped to be able to beat off the Red Belt, if he made a determined resistance.

He saw that the chances were against him in a combat; but to be taken, with Isodor to appear against him as a mutineer, murderer, and kidnapper of the yacht, to give it over to the Spaniards, there was nothing but death before him he well knew.

The two yachts were now near enough to throw a biscuit from the deck of one to the other.

Crittenden was watching his enemy closely, and he saw that he intended to resist, for the muskets in the hands of the mutineers were distinctly visible.

Thus watching him, he saw the movement of Binnacle, as he started to give the order to fire, and he said, in a quick, low tone:

"Be ready to drop down, men, at my word."

The moment after came the order of the mutineer leader:

"Give it to them, lads! Fire!"

The same instant Crittenden ordered:

"Down on your faces, all!"

Even the helmsman obeyed, and the fire of the mutineers went over the heads of the Red Belts, who arose with a cheer, as Melton Field sent his vessel alongside of the War-Cloud, and followed their young captain upon the deck of their enemy.

"Beat them back, dogs! It is die now by powder and lead, or hang for our work later," yelled Binnacle, and the mutineers opened a fire that was quite effective for several of the Red Belts went down, one dead the others wounded.

At the same instant the mutineers fell back toward the stern of the War-Cloud, for the Red Belts had boarded their craft forward of amidships.

Then, over the stern of the War-Cloud appeared a form.

It was Isodor Christobal, and turning, he bent over, giving a hand to the Indian sailor, who had aided him up, and with the youth's ready assistance now sprung lightly upon the deck of the War-Cloud.

The youth had his Diamond Cutlass in his hand, and the Indian was armed with his trusty knife.

Neither were seen by either the mutineers or the yacht's crew, until, with a shout, Isodor sprung forward and brought his keen cutlass down upon the head of Boreas, who just turned to meet him, while Seminole seized a negro mutineer in his arms and pitched him bodily overboard.

Taken by surprise the mutineers became panic-stricken, and with the yacht's crew now upon them, and the blade of Crittenden falling upon one of their number and killing him, they cried loudly for quarter, raising their arms pleadingly—all excepting Binnacle, and he made a bound for the side to spring into the sea.

But, Crittenden sprung after him, tripped him and in an instant had his cutlass at his heart while he said:

"You are the man I want above all! Put frons on him, boatswain," and turning to Isodor he grasped his hand warmly, while he cried:

"Well, Isodor, I am glad to see you."

"And again I owe you my life, Captain Crittenden."

"Was it as bad as that?"

"Yes indeed, for these fellows are in Spanish pay, and meant to run the yacht to Havana, give her up to the captain-general, and have me garroted, for which they had already bargained, or at least that man had," and he pointed to Binnacle, who muttered:

"Curse you, boy."

"Well, just such as he is need hanging, and I shall take good care that he and his mates get their deserts."

"Now, Isodor, you need a crew, so I'll lend you half a score of my men, and you had better sail at once for home and get your slaves, for you can trust them, and I have to keep in a vicinity not very far from here to meet a craft I am expecting; and which you know of, but, as we run back several hours together, I will remain upon your vessel with you, which, though she beat me on her trial trip, was not handled well enough to do it to-night."

Isodor laughed, and said:

"Seminole, haul in our drags, and let Captain Crittenden see what was the reason he caught the War-Cloud, and I would like the mutineers to see also," and turning once more to Crittenden, who was gazing with surprise at the Indian, as he leant over the taffrail, a boat-hook in hand, Isodor continued:

"Captain Crittenden, that noble Indian saved my life, for he was one of the crew, and informed me of Binnacle's plot, while, when the attack began, he threw me into the cabin, for I had made

up my mind to die, rather than go to Havana to be garroted."

"This splendid fellow! you should keep him with you, Isodor."

"I intend to, and he shall be my first mate, for, Indian though he is, he knows a ship from keel to truck, understands navigation, and is as brave as a lion."

"Now, see why the Red Belt crept up on us," and Isodor pointed to the cable which Seminole was dragging upon deck, and the sight of which caused Crittenden and his men to utter exclamations of surprise, while Binnacle and his fellow mutineers gritted their teeth with rage, when they saw how they had been outwitted by their young prisoner.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ISLAND RENDEZVOUS.

The two beautiful vessels, with the mutineer prisoners in the hold of the War-Cloud, soon started up the Gulf, the Red Belt under full sail, the new yacht without topsails, a flying jib set, and thus sailing side by side.

"I tell you, Isodor, you have the fastest craft I ever saw, for the Belt is a good one to make comparisons with, as in a good breeze I have often held my own with steamers," said Crittenden, as he stood with the young Cuban upon the deck of his vessel, watching with delight the sailing of the two yachts.

"The Cloud, that father had built for me, Senor Crittenden, was very fast, but this one could run away from her, I am sure; and I am glad that she can, for much depends upon her speed," answered Isodor.

"Yes, much indeed; and I predict that you will win a name for yourself, Isodor, during the coming struggle in Cuba, for you will serve the cause far more upon this vessel than you could do ashore."

"I hope I can do much for poor Cuba, for I long to see her free, while I am most revengeful against the Spaniards who took from me my father, my mother and my home—yes, and drove my sister as a refugee into the United States."

"You, Colonel Crittenden—for you hold that rank now in the cause of *Cuba Libre*—know what we have suffered, and if ever, in your service on the island, you get into your power Colonel Cazandra Morelos, I beg you to kill him as you would a snake."

"He pretended to love my sister Estrella, and sought her hand in marriage; but the truth is, he was harassed by debts and sought to get her fortune through making her his wife."

"He told her he would spare father and all if she would become the Senora Morelos, and threatened her if she refused."

"I thank the Mary Mother that she had the courage to defy him and his threats, and some day I hope to meet him, and then, such mercy as he showed to my poor father will I show to him."

Isodor spoke with an excitement of manner which Duke Crittenden had never seen him show before; but he knew that if the boy had registered a vow to be avenged upon Colonel Morelos, he would keep it, come what might; and he, too, swore that the Spanish officer should have no mercy should he fall into his hands.

"I saw your sister only two days ago, Isodor, and bade her farewell, as I do not believe I can run up to the Cuba Cottage again."

"Colonel Crittenden, take care of your life in this coming struggle, for should aught happen to you it would kill poor sister, and should I fall, you will be all that she has in the world to love."

Thus they talked until late into the night, when Duke Crittenden hailed the Red Belt and went on board, as Isodor held on up into Mobile Bay.

He arrived in good time and received a warm welcome from Estrella, who also greeted the Indian sailor with great kindness when she heard all that he had done for her brother.

Not wishing to keep the crew, loaned him by Crittenden, any longer than was necessary, Isodor got his slaves aboard the War-Cloud, and a gallant lot of fellows they were, thorough sailors, athletes, brave as lions, fierce as tigers if aroused, and devoted to their young master.

Their leader, Bonita, was a tall, handsome man, once an American slave, and sold in Cuba through the death of a former master who had died there while on a visit.

Running away from a cruel owner, Bonita had hidden for two years upon an island in the Gulf coast of the United States, and then venturing to sea, had been picked up by a trading vessel that had carried him back to Havana, where Don Christobal had become his purchaser.

From that day Bonita was the devoted companion, as well as slave, of Isodor, and the two were devotedly attached to each other.

Bonita had a fair education, did not speak with the negro dialect, and was capable of commanding a vessel fully as well as was his young master.

With Bonita, who acted as an officer, Seminole, the Indian, and six black seamen on board the War-Cloud, Isodor considered himself prepared for a voyage, and, after a sad parting with his sister, he set sail for New Orleans, intending to hunt up the Red Belt on his way, and return to Colonel Crittenden his crew.

A few hours after running out of Mobile Bay, the Red Belt was sighted, and in company with her was a large schooner.

Ere the War-Cloud reached them, the schooner set sail in an easterly direction, while the Red Belt held on in the direction of the Chandeleur Islands, leaving Isodor to follow.

Crowding on sail, Isodor overhauled the Red Belt, and as he ran near, received a rousing cheer from fully a hundred men that were upon her decks, which were also crowded with boxes, bales and bundles, that had been taken from the trading schooner, now hull down to the eastward.

As the Red Belt was loaded down, Isodor offered to share her freight, and, the wind being light, the two vessels were run alongside, and Colonel Crittenden sprang on board, accompanied by General Lopez and the officers of the Cuban Junta.

They all greeted the Cuban youth most cordially, and the general explained that they were on their way to the island rendezvous among the Chandeleurs, where they could arrange definitely all their plans for the future, see just what arms were to be sent out in the first cargo of the War-Cloud, and to appoint their leaders.

"Colonel Crittenden informed us of your narrow escape, Captain Christobal, and that he has the mutineers on his vessel, so we will hold a council of war as to what shall be their fate," said the President of the Junta, an elderly looking Cuban of distinguished appearance.

A rapid run soon brought them in sight of the island rendezvous, for the War-Cloud went in ahead of the Red Belt, and with Bueno at the helm the vessel was taken to a safe anchorage.

In the interior of the island, which was of considerable size, was a hidden camp, where a hundred or more dark-faced Cuban Patriots were gathered, while tents near by were filled with boxes of arms, stores, bales of uniforms and ammunition in great quantities.

Those on the island greeted their comrades with ringing cheers, and when the Red Belt had landed its cargo of human and other freight, there followed a most exciting scene.

To a vessel sailing by this island no one on board would have suspected what a secret was hidden inland, and that a small army was organizing there to make a descent in time upon the Gem of the Antilles to attempt to free Cuba from the proud sovereign of Spain.

There were hidden away in a small inlet a sail-boat and two life-skiffs, the former to be used as a dispatch craft to the mainland, if necessary, and the latter for fishing.

Guards were kept posted about the island, and constantly on the alert, that none of the men showed themselves to passing vessels, or that one wishing to escape and prove traitor had no opportunity to get away.

All knew that the revenue cutters and United States cruisers would quickly pounce upon them and seize all, did they get an inkling of the existence of a secret camp being there, and yet no better rendezvous and fitting-out place could be found anywhere on the American coast.

The general-in-chief of the Patriots and the Junta had come to investigate for themselves just what was going on, and what they had under their direction, after which they intended returning to New Orleans in the Red Belt to further perfect arrangements, while the War-Cloud went on her way with the first cargo to be landed secretly in Cuba.

They congratulated themselves, therefore, upon meeting the swift vessel, and that her young commander had not been forced to go on to New Orleans to see them.

"We will give you a valuable cargo, Captain Christobal, and the men can put it on board at once, so that you can set sail during the night, and we can also start upon our return, leaving General Varona here in charge of the men, to drill them and get them ready to take command as officers as soon as they reach the island.

"But now there is one important duty to perform, after which I will give you the dispatch for the chief of the League in Cuba, and you

can bring us back full information from them of just how matters are progressing there," said the President of the Junta, addressing Isodor.

"And this duty now to be performed, senior?" asked the youth.

"The trial of those mutineers, and their execution," was the response, and half an hour after, loaded with irons, Binnacle, the Spanish spy, and his fellow-mutineers, were brought before the stern-faced men who were going to sit in judgment upon them.

CHAPTER X.

LIFE FOR LIFE.

THERE were five of the mutineers, Binnacle and four of the unfortunate wretches whom he had led into the affair.

They were guilty of murder upon the high seas, of kidnapping the yacht, and of the intention to carry Isodor Christobal to Havana, where they knew that his execution would follow.

By the laws of any land their crimes would be punishable with death.

Should they be delivered up to the United States authorities, as Colonel Crittenden wished that they should be for punishment, it was quickly shown that they would save their necks by betraying the Cuban retreat on the island, and thus ruin the plans of the Patriots.

True, Cuba was not yet a Government in itself; but against those struggling to make it such, a great crime had been committed, and the punishment meted out to those who were its bitter foes, must be such as would be visited by any country upon such offenders as had been Binnacle and his men.

It was shown by the testimony of the Indian sailor, that Binnacle was a Spanish spy, and had gathered the crew that were on the War-Cloud, by special promises of gold, for some venture that was against the law, yet would pay them well.

At sea, before striking, he had told them what amount he would give them, had gained their consent to steal the yacht and deliver Isodor up to the captain-general, and it was because they would get a larger price for him alive than dead, that they did not kill him.

Binnacle, it was proven, had attacked Isodor, and when, in defending himself, he had killed one mutineer and wounded another, the ring-leader had had that poor wretch thrown into the sea along with the dead.

He had also fired upon the Red Belt when she floated the United States flag, and was, for all these crimes, deserving of death.

Beneath the shades of a wide-spreading tree sat the Cuban Junta, sitting as a tribunal upon the prisoners.

Upon their right sat General Lopez, Isodor and Colonel Crittenden, while upon their left were the other officers of the Patriot force.

In their front were the five mutineers, livid and trembling, for they saw death before them rather than the blood-money they had hoped to win by their crime.

In a semicircle about them stood the Patriots, stern and silent, and upon one side of the prisoners, erect, stolid and unmoved, Seminole, the Indian sailor.

He was a strangely handsome man, though having the features of his tribe.

Scarcely over thirty-three, his stern look of dignity and conscious power caused him to appear a trifle older.

His form was a model of symmetry and strength combined, and he was dressed in white duck pants, a blue woolen shirt and a scarlet skull-cap, which gave him a picturesque appearance with his dark skin, piercing black eyes and ebony hair.

In the distance, lying alongside of the bank where the water was deep, were the two yachts, and half a hundred men were busy loading the War-Cloud with the assorted cargo which had been selected for her to carry out on her first perilous run.

Bonita was there superintending the loading, and no better hand could have been found, for the white men worked willingly under his direction, so courteous was he to them, and at the same time they saw that he fully understood just where to put everything and just how to do it.

In the mean time the trial of the mutineers progressed, and, as darkness came on and battle lanterns were placed here and there, throwing a weird look upon the faces of all, it was a weird and picturesque scene.

Having heard the testimony of Seminole, who told clearly all that had been made known to him by Binnacle, ashore and on the yacht, the President of the Cuban Junta asked:

"And why did you ship on the vessel if you knew there was something wrong to be done?"

"Me no murderer," was the reply.

"That does not answer my question."

"Me have heart."

"Yet you became one of a crew that you knew were going to do some murderous work?"

The eyes of the Seminole flashed, while he answered:

"Me one time in Havana, four year ago, and was sick, had hard time, no gold, no eat."

"Me saw young boy one day, and boy saw me."

"He have eyes, and saw me sick and poor, so give me plenty of gold."

"That was boy, and me no forget, though he sea chief now," and he pointed to Isodor.

"Ah! you shipped on board to save him?"

The Indian sailor nodded, while Isodor said:

"I remember the circumstance now."

"I was strolling along, looking at the shipping, when this man caught my eye."

"He was very sick, it seemed to me, and in great distress, and so I gave him quite a sum of gold I had with me; but he has returned the favor with interest."

"Curse him! he has saved you and hanged me," growled Binnacle, but no one paid any attention to the remark, and after the Indian had told all of his story of the capture of the yacht, Isodor was called upon for his version of the affair.

He spoke of how he told the builder that he distrusted the men, and all the while had a dread of coming evil.

Then he told how the Indian sailor had sprung to his aid, when he forced the attack, and that he had stood by him staunchly through all.

"Senors, the testimony is in against these prisoners, and you have heard all, so it is for us to decide regarding their punishment," and the President of the Junta turned to his comrades of that body.

All looked grave and remained silent, until the President asked:

"What say you, senors?"

"I say they should die!"

"A life for a life!"

"They deserve death!"

"Let them be executed!"

"They had no mercy, so let none be given them!"

So answered the members of the Junta, in their turn, and the President added:

"And so say I."

A groan issued from the lips of the prisoners, while a murmur of approbation ran through the band of Patriots.

"Prisoners, you have heard what has been said, and I therefore now pass sentence upon you."

"That sentence is that you be taken out to sea, two leagues distant from the American shores, on board of the Cuban schooner, War-Cloud, and then, by order of her commander, Captain Isodor Christobal, you be shot to death by a platoon of Patriots detailed for that duty."

"The War-Cloud has never yet raised the flag of any nation; she was built for a Cuban, and is a Cuban craft—so upon her deck no nationality is represented, and the execution will therefore be the work of Patriots, and under the ensign which to-night we hoist upon her."

"Senior Captain, detail twelve men as an execution squad, and place them on board the War-Cloud when she is ready to sail."

"Prisoners, may Heaven forgive your crimes, and have mercy upon your guilty souls!"

So spoke the President of the Junta, and the trial had ended.

CHAPTER XI.

THE EXECUTION AT SEA.

JUST at midnight the War-Cloud, loaded with a precious cargo, one beyond price for the Patriots, raised anchor and headed out of the island inlet.

Upon her decks were her negro crew, standing at their posts, Bonita and the Indian sailor acting as officers, and forward the execution squad of twelve men, under a sergeant.

Amidships were the five prisoners, in irons, and near them a squad of four armed men under a corporal.

Aft on the quarter-deck stood Isodor, watching his vessel as she moved out, and standing by the side of his helmsman.

Near him was Colonel Crittenden, talking to General Lopez, and on the starboard side, grouped together, smoking and talking in a subdued tone, were the members of the Junta and half a dozen Patriot officers.

Just astern of the War-Cloud came the Red

Belt, her decks black with men, for all of the island force nearly had been ordered out to witness the execution.

The wind was very light, and the two pretty yachts hardly made more than four knots an hour, so that it was after one o'clock before Colonel Crittenden said:

"Isodor, we are fully two leagues out, and I am anxious to land the Patriots and get well away from the vicinity of the island before dawn."

"Then I shall lay to here; but I wish that I had not been selected for this sad duty," returned the youth, and he gave an order that at once brought the War-Cloud up into the wind, where she lay calmly rocking upon the swell.

The Red Belt ran up close and came to, and then the silence that followed was painful.

"All ready, Captain Christobal," said the Junta's President; and without a tremor came the order:

"All hands ahoy to witness execution!"

Then Isodor gave an order to Seminole, and a platform, already prepared, was raised out over the port bulwark, and another command brought the execution squad into their position against the starboard bulwark, and two of the condemned men were marched to the death stand, the other three being led forward to witness the execution of their fellow-prisoners.

"Is there any vessel in sight?" asked General Lopez, and the sea was swept by glances, but only one sail, and that leagues away, was visible.

"I am glad that it is so, for we wish no reports to go into port of mysterious firing by night in these waters," said Colonel Crittenden.

The two men, first to die, then mounted the platform, groaning as they did so, and were placed upon the edge that overhung the water.

They were heavily ironed, and a twelve-pound shot had been attached to their feet, that when they fell under the fire, they might sink quickly to their graves beneath the sea.

"All ready, Senor Master," called out Bonita, and Isodor drew his Diamond Cutlass and stepped briskly forward.

"Attention, platoon!"

The execution squad quickly obeyed, for they had been standing at a parade rest.

"Shoulder arms!"

The order was promptly executed.

"You know how you are to fire, the six to the right, at the right-hand man, the six to the left, at the man on the left. Ready! aim! fire!"

The muskets pealed forth as one shot, and the two men sunk backward into the sea.

Then the next two were led upon the platform, the platoon loading their muskets meanwhile, and once more Isodor gave the order that ushered two more souls into eternity.

As Binnacle was called he stepped forward and said:

"Senor Captain, I will make a clean story of it for my life."

"What have you to tell?" asked Isodor.

"All about the Spaniards."

"There is nothing for you to tell that we do not know, for we are aware that they have their spies at work against us all the time, and you are not in any of their secrets."

"I will join the Patriots then, senor," whined Binnacle.

"We want no such man as you are in our ranks."

"Lead him to the platform," cried Isodor, and the guard dragged him away, while he begged piteously for his life.

Again the order was given to the platoon to be ready, and the frightened man, with a shriek of terror, sprung backward off of the platform before the order to fire came from Isodor's lips, and sunk from sight forever beneath the waters.

A sigh of relief broke from every heart, when all was over, farewells were said, God-speeds given to Isodor upon his perilous cruise, and the War-Cloud fell off upon the wind and sailed away in her voyage of danger, while the Junta, General Lopez and the others, returned to the Red Belt with Crittenden, and the yacht put back for the island retreat.

Having landed the men, the Red Belt, with General Lopez and the Junta on board, moved briskly away from the island, under an increasing breeze, just as the dawn broke.

Standing upon the deck of his yacht, Duke Crittenden's handsome face wore a cloud seldom seen there, and he murmured earnestly:

"Heaven protect that poor boy, as well for his own as his sister's sake, and the good he may do for Cuba."

"But alas! the shadow of some coming evil seems to rest heavily upon my heart, and I cannot throw it off, strive as I may."

CHAPTER XII.

THE NIGHT LANDING.

UNDER a fair spread of canvas the War-Cloud started forth upon her errand, her boy commander at his post, his black crew ready to do his slightest bidding, and the Indian sailor, standing like a statue, gazing back over the waters to where the Red Belt was visible in the moonlight, heading back toward the island.

For the work he was to perform, no better person could have been selected to accomplish it, than was Isodor Christobal.

He knew the coast as he did his own birth-place, for he had run into every nook, inlet and lagoon for leagues along the shores, on either side of Villa Vista plantation.

Bueno had been his constant companion, and he too was a thorough coast pilot.

Then too the boy and his faithful negro companion had hunted in the mountains, ridden over the valleys and traversed the points from shore to shore of the island.

If there was a secret nook anywhere, Isodor knew of it, and many a retreat was known to him, which was as a sealed book to others, as the boy had had a knack for finding out-of-the-way places.

So he was just the one to land a cargo upon the coast and know where to hide it.

Still he could not do this alone, and the perilous duty devolved upon him of communicating with those who were to aid him.

To do this he had already formed his plan.

As the daylight drew near the wind increased, and as the War-Cloud went bowling along swiftly, Isodor sought his cabin to rest, for the strain upon him had been a severe one.

After a run of several days, in which every vessel sighted had been avoided as much as possible, the coast of Cuba was sighted just at sunset, for the youth cared not to run close by daylight.

Heading for a point near his old home, Isodor crowded on all sail, to get as near as possible to the shore before the moon should rise.

"I shall go ashore in my skiff, Bonita, so as not to carry the yacht nearer inshore than a league, and I will cast off, while under headway, so you can hold on down the coast, and return within an hour or two, and then if you get no signal, stand out to sea."

"But return to-morrow night, and stand slowly along past Villa Vista, and, if I cannot come out I will display a red light at Sunset Rock; if I wish you to run in, I will show a blue one, and if I come off I will do so, meeting you a league off shore."

"Yes, Senor Master; but I wish you would let the Indian sailor take charge of the yacht, so I could go with you, as you might need me."

"No, Bonita, it is best that I go alone, and I wish you to come every night, running off and dropping the island by day, for one week; then, if I do not come off, or you get no word from me, return to the Retreat Island, as something will have happened to me."

"You must be awful careful, Senor Master."

"I will be, Bonita, for I live for far more than myself. I live for the cause of Free Cuba, my sister and my revenge," and the youth went forward to order his light skiff brought on deck.

It was a life-boat, light as a feather, yet stanch, and carried a mast and sail lashed on the bottom.

Then there were two pairs of oars, a rudder and a locker.

The boat was of metal, and in the bottom was a trap that could be raised, which would allow the water to rush in and sink it in a minute.

To this was attached a line with a small buoy, so that the place where it sunk could be found again.

By means of lines attached to the boat's bow, stern and sides, it could be drawn up from the bottom and readily emptied of the water.

Going into the cabin, Isodor was absent for quite a while, and then in the apparent negro youth that came upon deck, no one would have recognized the Cuban Boy Insurgent.

He wore a woolly wig, his face was blackened to the exact hue of a negro, his dress was that of a Cuban house servant, and his disguise altogether was complete.

But beneath his jacket he wore a pair of trusty revolvers, and in an inner pocket carried the dispatches sent by the Junta and General Lopez to the Insurgent chiefs in the island.

The land was now not more than a league distant, the yacht was sailing along parallel with the shore, and upon the sea side the skiff was put over into the water.

Then Isodor said farewell to his faithful companions and casting off, was left dancing in the wake of the schooner.

He remained quietly upon the waters until the War-Cloud was half a mile away, and then he took his oars, and pulled for the shore, the blades rising and falling noiselessly, and there being no sound in the rowlocks to reach an ear thirty feet distant.

He saw the white walls of his ruined home loom up, as he turned his head and glanced ashore, and pulled for the little bay where he had so loved to row and swim in early boyhood.

The ruined pier, charred and black, still remained, and he ran alongside, for he saw that he could make his way ashore along the still unburnt timber.

His oars were then made fast, the slide pulled out, and as the boat sunk he stepped out upon the pier.

Down to the bottom it went, and leaning over he took the little float and hid it beneath a timber.

Then he made his way ashore, and ascending the hill to the sloping lawn, he soon stood before the ruined villa.

The chirp of a cricket and the fall of the surf were the only sounds that reached his ears.

With a heart full of emotion he stood gazing upon the home where he was born, and where he had passed so many days of happiness.

"I shall go mad if I remain here," he said, and he passed on his way, winding around the spacious ruins of the once elegant mansion, going by the slaves' quarters, and thence into a heavy forest.

Rapidly he walked on his way, and with the air of one who knew well the path he trod.

Passing through a gateway, he paused an instant and said:

"It was here I parted with dear little Ninez, when I came to Cuba last time, after the body of my poor father."

"I wonder if Ninez will be glad to see me?"

"She at least would never know me as I am," and he passed on his way.

A walk of some distance brought him in sight of a light glimmering through the trees, and, as the moon was now up, he beheld the outline of a large mansion beyond the park.

This he approached and started to the front door, but checking himself said:

"Slaves go to the kitchen door, not the front."

So saying he went to the kitchen doorway, and suddenly a large dog sprang upon him.

He clutched the animal by the throat, said something in a quick, sharp tone, and threw him from him.

The animal skulked to his feet, while a voice said:

"Well, that's the first time I ever saw that dog mastered, except by myself."

"Who are you, my man?"

The speaker had been seated upon a back veranda, smoking, and had sprung toward Isodor as he saw the dog make for him.

The light of an open door shone upon him, revealing a young man with a striking face, slender sinewy form, above the average height of Cubans, though he was evidently one of that race. Isodor touched his hat politely and said:

"I come from the Aldawa Plantation, Senor Master, and I have a message for you."

The dialect of the Cuban negro was perfect that he used, and the young Cuban answered:

"All right, my boy, give me the letter."

"I have no letter, senor, but a message, which master wished me to deliver to you in private, for it is important," and Isodor spoke in a whisper.

"Come with me into my library," and the Cuban led the way into the handsome mansion.

Passing an open door Isodor saw a well-furnished room, where sat an aged couple, listening to a beautiful young girl of about fourteen read aloud.

He but glanced into the room, and then passed on into the one further along the hall.

It was half library, half office, and then there were guns, fishing-rods, and relics of the chase scattered about.

It was the room of the young planter, where he kept his plantation books, received his slaves when they called to see him and spent his leisure hours when not in the saddle, or about the place.

"Well, my lad, I do not recognize you as one of the Aldawa slaves: are you a late purchase?" and the young planter turned and gazed upon the supposed negro in the full glare of the lamp.

"Suppose I tell you, master, where we last met, would you recognize me?"

"I have seen you before," was the puzzled answer.

"Yes, senor, I put you ashore from my yacht"

some months ago, off the Villa Vista," and Isodor spoke in his natural voice.

"Isodor! it is you?" cried the Cuban planter in dire amazement.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TWO PATRIOTS.

"ISODOR, no one on earth would ever have known you, for a more complete metamorphosis, and better acting I never saw," said Leon De Soto, the young Cuban planter, as he grasped the hand of the Boy Insurgent again and again.

"Still, Senor Leon, I am only Isodor Christobal, disguised as a negro, and I have landed to-night to see you, for I come with dispatches from the *Junta* in New Orleans, from General Lopez and others, and I have the finest yacht you ever saw, loaded with an invaluable cargo for Cuban Patriots."

"God bless you, my friend! You are indeed true to the cause of Cuba Libre; but where is your vessel?"

"Off the coast, and my faithful Bonita and crew on board."

"Well, you must go with me to-night to one secret meeting, and there you will see the Patriot chiefs in council."

"I have come just in the right time; but I hate to have them see me in disguise like this."

"Better thus than that you be recognized and garroted, for your old enemy, Colonel Morelos, is full chief in this district now."

"Oh! that I had that man at arm's length," said Isodor, speaking almost savagely.

"The time will soon come, Isodor, when I hope you may have him so."

"As for me, he comes here to see me, treats me well, and pretends the greatest gratitude because I once saved his life; but I cannot but feel that he is a snake in the grass, and is trying to make use of me to catch others, for he knows my whole sympathy is with Cuba, and, as you know, my name was upon the 'Dead List' as a Patriot leader, at the time your father and the others met death at his hands."

"But Isodor, that was a most remarkable retreat you made that night with your father's body, and the Spaniards have you under sentence of a dozen deaths, it they can lay hands upon you."

"But, we must be off, so let me call my little sister Ninez and see if she will recognize you."

Isodor was anxious to see his little girl sweetheart, Ninez, and waited until Leon De Soto went to the sitting-room and called her.

Bowing low, as the beautiful little girl entered, Isodor said:

"How do you do, senorita?"

Ninez bowed, glanced at the supposed negro and then said:

"Brother told me I would meet an old friend in here; but I do not remember you."

"From whose plantation do you come?"

"The Christobal Plantation, Senorita Ninez."

"Ah! were you one of the slaves of the poor Don?"

"Yet still I do not recall you."

"My name is Isodor, senorita," was the low reply.

A cry escaped the girl's lips, and she sprang forward, checked her impulse to throw her arms about the youth's neck, and grasped his hands, while she cried:

"Oh, why have you come here, Isodor?"

"On duty."

"But you are in such danger."

"So are all who dare to serve poor Cuba, Ninez."

"Alas! it is too true; but no one would ever know you, Isodor."

"That is just what I am glad of, I assure you; but here comes your brother, and I must go with him."

"But I shall see you again?" urged the girl.

"I hope so," and Leon De Soto entering, the two left the house together.

The young planter had himself saddled two horses, for he cared not to trust even his own faithful slaves with secrets that might leak out, and mounting, the two friends rode away.

The road taken by Leon De Soto was through the plantations and toward the coast, for by following this they would simply have to cross the highways, which they wished to avoid all that was possible.

Riding side by side in the darkness, a silence fell upon the two, for both were busy with their thoughts: the youth recalling the happy days of boyhood he had passed there—now gone from him forever—and the planter thinking of Estrella Christobal, to whom he had offered his love long before, and received only friendship in return.

"You told me that the senorita was well,

Isodor?" said Leon De Soto, at last breaking the silence.

"Yes, Senor Leon, and I must tell you of my run home in the sloop, after I brought you back."

And Isodor, who knew the love secret of Leon De Soto and wished to destroy all hope in his heart that he could one day win Estrella, told him of again meeting the young American, who two years before had saved them from the sinking packet, and that he had protected him from the Spanish vessel that had given chase to him.

He admired Leon De Soto greatly, loved him as he might a brother, but felt that his love, being hopeless, should not be encouraged.

"And this young American, you say, Isodor, returned with you to your home on Mobile Bay?" sadly asked Leon.

"Yes; and Estrella greeted him most warmly, for, as you know I told you, she had always loved him since he saved us from the sinking packet."

"And he?"

"Loves her, Senor Leon, and they are engaged."

"I wish them every happiness, Isodor; but it is a bitter blow to me," sadly said De Soto.

"And Senor Leon, the Senor Crittenden has enlisted in the cause of Cuba, and the *Junta* have made him a colonel of cavalry, while he has placed his yacht at the disposal of General Lopez and the Patriots, and will bring them here when the proper time comes for landing."

"This is noble of him, and I should like to know the gallant American, even though he wins a brevet I would give my life for; but tell me more of him."

Isodor told all he knew about Colonel Crittenden, along with the movements of the Patriots in America, the secret island, the mutiny and execution, and all that could possibly interest the young Cuban.

"You are making a great name for yourself, Isodor, and, for a boy in years, you have more than done the work of a man."

"I hope to win a name, Senor Leon; but do you think it possible that a landing can be made to-night, for I am anxious to get the cargo secreted and return for another one?"

"I'll tell you what is best to do."

"Well?"

"At the forks of the road beyond here, you go on to the spot where you were to signal the yacht, and have her run in to the mouth of the lagoon."

"We have our retreat on the top of Rock Hill, and our boats are there, while we have derricks to lower them into the sea beneath the cliff."

"That is a good idea."

"There are seven boats, and these should empty the yacht in three loads each, and they will have but a hundred yards to row."

"I will go to the retreat, get the men to lower the boats and be in readiness by the time you get to the lagoon with the yacht."

"This will be best, for it is not yet midnight, and two hours will strip the yacht of her cargo."

At the place where the plantation roads forked, the two friends, after some further arrangements together, parted, Leon De Soto riding toward a wooded hill a mile away, and Isodor in the direction of his old home of Vista Villa.

CHAPTER XIV.

REVEALED BY THE MOONLIGHT.

SWINGING to his belt, Isodor had a lantern, which was not lighted.

It was a signal lantern, with slides of blue, white and red glass, and with it he was to signal the yacht.

The Sunset Rock, to which he made his way was a cliff that jutted out into the sea, and not unlike Rock Hill, a mile further down the coast, which overhung the waters, although the top of the latter was believed to be inaccessible to the foot of man, and the summit was covered with heavy timber.

Its bold front was over a hundred feet high, and its top several acres in size, while all around it, inshore and seaward, was the face of the cliff.

Isodor, however, had one day discovered how to reach its summit, and the secret he had kept to himself.

He had been in pursuit of game, and coming upon a cave hidden by a thicket, had, boy-like, boldly entered it.

Finding it too dark to see how far it extended, he had returned to the villa for Bonita, and with lanterns they had gone back to the place, daringly invaded the cavern, and following its

upward windings for half a mile, to their amazement had come out upon the top of Rock Hill.

Both had faithfully kept the secret, until Isodor had told it to Leon De Soto when he had last been in Cuba, and the young planter had made it a rendezvous of Patriots.

Derricks had been rigged on top, with the aid of the trees, so that boats could be hauled up and down, and these had been secured and taken there, while the fugitive Cubans, hiding in the mountains from Spanish soldiers, had gone there to remain until duty called them.

It was to this place Leon De Soto went, after leaving Isodor.

He rode down on one side, gave a signal which was answered from above, and hitching his horse, he walked down to the shore and waited.

Soon a boat came toward him, with two men in it.

A password was given and answered, Leon De Soto sprang into the boat, and a pull of a hundred yards brought them to the face of the cliff.

Ropes hung there down to the water, and with iron hooks upon the end.

These were made fast to the bow and stern of the boat, a signal was given, and up into the air it went.

Up, up, up, until strong hands seized it and dragged it upon the top of the cliff.

Where stood nearly a hundred dark and silent men, who pressed about the young Cuban as he advanced toward them.

"Ah, Colonel De Soto, I am glad you have come, for a trim craft off yonder, as you see, and I wondered if she was a Spaniard," and a Cuban, who appeared to be an officer, pointed to where the War-Cloud was slowly standing in toward a heavily-wooded point, where a lagoon emptied its waters into the sea.

"She is our vessel, Major Concha, and brings us a precious cargo—Hold! do not cheer, men, for we must be most cautious."

"The vessel is the Cuban yacht War-Cloud, under the Boy Insurgent, Captain Isodor Christobal, whom you all know."

"He will run into the lagoon, and you must at once lower all your boats, Senor Major, with full crews, and get the arms on the hill here by dawn."

"Gladly!" cried the Cuban major, and the men at once set to work to lower the boats into the sea.

The derricks had been strongly built, and worked well, and while the work of dropping the boats was in progress, Leon Desoto walked about the little camp.

It was a snug place for a retreat, for the rock bowled a little in the center, and with its thick-et-fringed edge, completely hid the top from view from sea or shore.

There were tents there, and stores of various kinds, and the place could have been held against ten thousand men with only a handful of defenders.

As all was in readiness, Leon De Soto and Major Concha descended in the last boat, and, with muffled oars pulled for the yacht, which had now run into the lagoon.

"Well, Bueno, I am glad to see you; but where is Senor Isodor?"

"I have not seen him, Senor De Soto; but he gave me the blue signal, from Sunset Rock, to run in and I did so," answered Bueno.

"Did he go ashore in his own boat?"

"Yes, senor."

"He should have been back before this, and I will land and look for him," said Leon De Soto anxiously.

Calling to a boat's crew to set him ashore, he left the yacht, while the unloading process went on with haste, and care that no sound should be made to attract the ear of any prowling Spanish soldier.

Arriving at the shore Leon De Soto sought the place where he had left his horse, and mounting, rode hastily toward Sunset Rock.

Arriving there he found no trace of the youth, and fearing some harm had befallen him, he set out along the main highway leading through the Villa Vista Plantation.

"He has doubtless gone by home."

"Poor boy, what a sad sight to him, to behold his loved home in ruins."

"I shall doubtless find him there brooding over his sorrows."

So saying he rode on his way, passed through the burned negro village, turned into the ornamental grounds of the villa, now overgrown with weeds, and at last came in sight of the white walls of the mansion.

It was bright moonlight, and the Cuban plan-

ter drew rein as he beheld two forms upon the lawn before the front entrance to the villa.

As he walked the sound of steel clashing against steel came to his ears, and spurring forward he cried:

"Isodor has run upon the Spaniards!"

CHAPTER XV. WELL MET.

It will be remembered that Isodor Christobal was last seen riding toward Sunset Rock, from which position he had agreed with Bueno to signal him whether to run in with the yacht, or put to sea again until the next night.

He arrived upon the spot just at midnight, as he saw by glancing at his watch.

The moon was on the wane, but it was a clear night; and the War-Cloud was sighted, a league off-shore, cruising slowly along.

Lighting his lantern, Isodor displayed the blue-light signal, waving it several times around his head.

Bueno was doubtless on the watch, for in less than half a minute the yacht was seen to head shoreward.

Isodor watched her until he saw her steering for the place agreed upon, the mouth of the lagoon, just above Rock Hill, and then he turned and rode slowly away.

Taking the road that led to Villa Vista, in about ten minutes he rode up to the ruin.

For a long time he sat upon his horse, his thoughts busy with bitter memories.

Then, as he was about to ride down to the shore, where he had told Leon De Soto he would leave his horse, and go off in his skiff, which it will be remembered he sunk alongside of the pier, he heard the sound of hoof-falls.

He naturally thought that it was Leon De Soto, for who else could it be?

But his eyes fell upon a horseman coming from the main highway, and riding directly toward the villa.

Drawing his horse back into the unused wing of the mansion, Isodor quickly dismounted, and hastily deposited a long bundle which he had carried with him from the yacht.

It was in fact the Diamond Cutlass, which he wished to be the instrument of his revenge upon his foes, should he meet them in personal encounter, and which he would not go without, so had carried it with him to the De Soto mansion and back.

Then he glided through the ruined building and stood in the arch of the front hallway.

From there he could see just who it was that was seeking that spot in the night.

Hardly had he gained the doorway, when the horseman appeared in sight.

He rode directly toward the front entrance, and halted within a few paces of the door.

The moonlight shone full upon him, and it revealed the face of a Spanish major, one who had been most anxious to carry out the cruel orders of execution upon Don Christobal and his fellow-Patriots.

In disguise, Isodor had stood near and seen his father and his comrades die under the cruel *garrote*, and that man now before him had given the orders in a way that showed he gloated over the red work he had to perform.

"It is Major Barnabe Buriel, the man who has murdered Cubans without compunction, and who delighted in seeing my father die."

"Why he has come here, God only knows, unless it is that a strange fatality has led him here to his doom."

"Ah! he speaks."

So hissed the boy, standing within ten feet of the horseman.

The moonlight revealed a face far from prepossessing, bearded, dark and forbidding.

But he wore the uniform of a Spanish major, and had proven himself a fitting one to crush the germ of freedom in the heart of a Cuban Patriot.

Many a wail of woe had Major Barnabe Buriel caused to ascend from Cuban homes, and now little dreaming of such a thing, he was face to face with the youth, about whose father's neck he had fastened the iron collar of the *garrote*, while he smiled in the face of his helpless victim and spoke words of bitter insult.

"Why on earth did that girl appoint to meet me here?" said the Spanish major aloud.

"It may be convenient for her, coming as she does from her home in the hills, but it is a place I do not like."

"I wish Colonel Morelos had come himself, or sent some one else, for I fancy I can see the form of Don Christobal, whom I garroted."

"What can the girl want anyhow?"

"Colonel Morelos seems to place great confidence in her, and it is true that she gave him

the information that led to the capture and execution of Don Christobal and his fellow-conspirators.

"The girl is a Cuban, or half-breed Indian, or something of the sort, and acted from revenge, because the Don, I believe, had put her lover, Rafael Ramirez, to death, because he was about to sell out the secret of revolt."

"Since then she has been laid up ill, or injured, I believe, at her home in the mountains, and now sends word to Morelos that she has important news for him, and I am sent here to receive it."

"Curse the girl! I wish she would come! but then I am ahead of the time appointed for the meeting here," and Major Buriel glanced uneasily about him.

Every word that he had uttered Isodor heard, and quietly leaving his place he slipped back through the ruin, secured his bundle, and making a flank movement, began to approach the Spaniard from the rear.

The horse started, as he began to cross the lanes, and the Spanish major turned quickly in his saddle.

"Ha! who comes there?" he cried.

"It's only me, master," cried Isodor, speaking humbly, and in the Cuban negro Spanish *patois*.

"And who are you?"

"Me only slave, Senor Master."

"What are you doing here?"

"Me come to see Spanish senor."

"What Spanish senor?"

"Don't know, senor; but senorita sent me."

"Ah! did some one send you here to see a Spanish officer?"

"Yes, senor."

"Who was it?"

"Senorita who lives in mountains."

"Ah, yes; the Senorita Fanita, whose father is known as the Indian Hermit?"

"Yes, senor."

"She lives with her old father in the mountains?"

"Yes, senor."

"And she send you?"

"Yes, senor."

"Are you her slave?"

"No, senor, she Indian senorita, and have no slave."

"Whose slave are you?"

"Me belong to this plantation, senor."

"Ah, yes, you were the Don's boy?"

"Yes, senor."

"Where do you live now?"

"Me run away when villa was burned, and me live in mountains."

"I see; well, what word the Senorita did Fanita send?"

"She expected to come herself, to meet Spanish officer, and tell him some news; but she was sick, so sent me."

"What did she say you must tell me?"

"That you are my prisoner, Major Barnabe Buriel!" came the startling response of Isodor, and in a voice that rung like a bugle's notes, and little like the assumed humble negro tone in which he had before spoken to the Spaniard.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DUEL AT THE RUINED VILLA.

As Isodor Christobal, the young Insurgent, uttered the words, he seized the rein of the Spaniard's horse in a grip of iron, and at the same time thrust a revolver under his face.

Major Barnabe Buriel was at heart a coward, as most cruel men are.

He was amazed at the act of the supposed negro, taken off his guard, and felt that he was wholly in his power.

What did it mean, was the question the Spaniard mentally asked himself, and he turned livid with fear, while he gasped forth:

"Who are you?"

"One who will allow you a chance for your life, though you do not deserve it."

"You are no negro?"

"Oh, no."

"Your face is black."

"That black will wash off, but that which is on your heart, blood cannot erase, though it may purify."

"What do you want with me?"

"Your life!"

"Would you kill me?"

"Yes, if you cannot defend your craven heart."

"How can I, when you cover me with a revolver?"

"I will give you the chance," and Isodor drew from the holster on the Spaniard's belt a small revolver, and then took the large pistols from the saddle holsters.

"You have me in your power."

"And shall keep you so until I get ready to allow you to act."

"What would you have me do?"

"Fight me."

"How can I?"

"You have a sword."

"And you a revolver?"

"We will be on equal terms soon."

"I hope so," groaned the Spaniard.

"Come, dismount!"

Major Buriel hesitated.

"Obey, or I pull trigger!"

The Spaniard quickly obeyed.

"Draw your sword!"

He did so.

"Now stand right here, on the blackened stones that were over the entrance to this villa," and Isodor led his prisoner to a spot directly in front of the entrance to the ruined villa.

"Now, Major Barnabe Buriel, you see that I am also armed with a sword, and with it I intend to meet you in a duel that shall be to the death."

"Who are you?" and the Spaniard's voice quivered.

"Do you see this cutlass?" and Isodor drew it out of the leather case in which he had carried it.

"Ah! I should know that blade!"

"Yes, it was given to Captain Atares, a Spaniard who has gained the name of The Butcher, and which name you deserve also, as you are just as cruel to Cubans."

"Where did you get that cutlass?"

"I took it from Butcher Atares."

"By Heaven! you are the Boy Insurgent, Isodor Christobal?"

"I am."

"And what do you here, in Cuba, where a price is upon your head?" haughtily demanded the Spaniard.

"I came for revenge."

The Spaniard shuddered, and Isodor continued:

"I am here, in disguise, senor, as I do not mind telling you, for I hope to kill you in a very few minutes."

"Would you murder me?"

"You know better, for I would not place myself on a par with you."

"I am here, as I said for revenge."

"I killed Captain Merida in a duel, I have shot my foes, when they have attacked me, and I intend to fight you a fair duel."

"If I kill you, and I believe that I shall do so, I will meet Captain Atares, the Butcher, and Colonel Morelos, and then my private feuds will have ended, and I shall strike in open battle for Cuba alone."

"But you, Senor Barnabe Buriel, put my father to death, and I witnessed how cruelly you did it, taunting him to the last instant of his life."

"Now, senor, raise your blade and fight for your life for I warn you that I shall kill you, if I can, and with this sword of Atares the Butcher."

"Draw, Senor Major and fight for your life and Spain, while I fight for revenge and Cuba!"

As he spoke, Isodor sent the revolver he had held, down upon the ground, and at once sprung forward to attack the Spaniard.

Major Buriel hastily raised his sword and cried:

"Then for life and Spain I fight, boy."

"Ay, Sir Spaniard, for life and Spain you fight, and I for revenge and Cuba," answered Isodor.

Instantly the two became engaged in a fierce duel, and it was at this moment that Leon De Soto sighted them, and came riding rapidly toward the spot.

Isodor feared it was a Spaniard coming to the rescue, and fought desperately to kill his enemy before he should come up.

Major Buriel deemed it an ally of the young Cuban, and strove to kill his adversary so as to be able to defend his life against the other.

The Spaniard was a fine swordsman, as indeed most Spaniards are, and he fought with fierce energy; but Isodor was a superior hand with a blade, in spite of his years, and he was as tough as iron, while Major Buriel was too lazy to keep up his practice, and consequently became soon tired.

Noting this Isodor pressed him harder, and more fiercely, and, just as Leon De Soto drew rein, he drove his sword through the body of the Spaniard.

Drawing it out quickly, as Major Buriel sunk upon the ground with a bitter wail of anguish, he turned, and raising the stained blade cried defiantly:

"And you too, Sir Spaniard!"
 "Ho, Isodor, would you attack me?" and Leon De Soto sprang to his side.
 "Ah, señor, I did not expect to see you here, so thought you an ally of Buriel the Butcher," said Isodor, and he grasped the outstretched hand of his friend, who seemed amazed at the scene he had run upon, there under the shadows of the ruined villa.

CHAPTER XVII.

A GIRL AVENGER.

"WELL, Isodor, you have done for Major Barnabe Buriel," cried Leon De Soto, as he sprang to the side of the prostrate Spaniard and saw that he was dead.

"Yes, and in killing him I have done Cuba a service, outside of my personal revenge," was the quiet answer.

"But where is his escort?"

"He came here alone."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"But for what motive?"

"I will tell you," and Isodor related what he had heard the Spaniard say in talking to himself.

"Ah! that woman is bent on some mischief, Isodor, and I fear her more than I do all the Spanish scouts and spies."

"So do I, señor."

"Since the day when we witnessed your father's execution, and in driving home my coachman ran over her, I have felt at rest, believing that she was laid up at her home in the mountains."

"But now that you tell me what Major Buriel said, it is certain that he came here to meet her, and she is therefore again plotting mischief, and even now may be watching what is going on in the lagoon."

"True."

"She knows this shore perfectly, and, with her on her feet again, I would not feel safe with the retreat, even on the top of Rock Hill."

"Nor I, señor."

"But what can be done?"

"You know that the Spaniard said he was ahead of time, as I told you?"

"Yes."

"She certainly will come here, if she made an appointment."

"Yes, unless—"

"Unless what, señor?"

"She has seen what has happened."

"We must risk that."

"How?"

"By remaining here to meet her."

"But for what purpose?"

"To capture her."

"Capture a woman, Isodor?"

"Cuba is to be more thought of than a woman's freedom."

"But what would you do with her, Isodor?"

"Take her off with me on the yacht."

"Ah!"

"There she could do no harm, and I would hold her as a prisoner until we had landed our cargoes and General Lopez had arrived."

"Not a bad idea; but it would kill her old father, for he would believe her dead, and he lives for her alone."

"I will fix that."

"How?"

"I will not take time to explain now, for we must act promptly."

"And do what?"

"You drag the body there into the hallway, and keep hidden, while I will lead your horse beyond yonder wing and mount the Spaniards."

The Cuban planter felt that Isodor had some good plot in his mind, so quickly obeyed.

The Spaniard was dragged into the hallway, the Cuban's horse led out of sight, and mounting the richly-caparisoned animal that had been ridden thither by Major Barnabe Buriel, Isodor began to ride to and fro in front of the ruin.

Still in his disguise as a negro, he certainly looked what he pretended to be, as he slowly rode back and forth over the lawn.

Standing in the shadow of the ruin, Leon De Soto watched him closely.

Presently he saw him halt, then ride toward a group of orange trees, and then from these shadows into the moonlight, came the form of a woman.

She was on foot, and walked briskly across the lawn, having caught sight of the horseman.

Isodor drew rein as she approached, and De Soto saw him dismount and greet her.

Then the two came walking slowly toward the ruin.

The one who thus met Isodor was a dark-

faced maiden, with large, beautiful black eyes, that had an almost fierce light in them.

Her mother had been the last of an Indian tribe that had dwelt in the mountains, and she had married a white man, a sailor.

This sailor, Fuentes, had fallen in love with the Indian girl, given up his life upon the sea, married her, and the two had settled down in a cabin home upon the coast, dwelling up in the hills.

There Fanita had been born, and reared, and her mother dying, she had become the only tie of love her old father had.

One day she had been saved from death by a young Cuban, Rafael Ramirez.

A profligate and reckless fellow, driven to desperation by his debts, he had betrayed the Cuban Conspiracy to Captain Merida, for which he was to receive a large sum in gold.

With this gold he was to fly from Cuba, carrying with him Fanita and the old Hermit Sailor, her father.

But Isodor had found out his plot to betray, had made it known to the Secret League, and Rafael Ramirez had been quickly put to death as a traitor.

Her Indian blood aroused to vengeance, Fanita had betrayed the secret, which she also knew from her lover, to Colonel Morelos, and Don Christobal's death, with others, had quickly followed, and the uprising of the Cubans had been prevented.

Returning from the execution, a strange fatality had caused Fanita to be run over by the very horses that drew the *volante* in which sat Isodor Christobal in disguise, and Leon De Soto.

They had carried her to her mountain home, and there left her, hovering between life and death, and yet she had recognized the Boy Insurgent in spite of his disguise, and so told him.

Restored to health again, Fanita Fuentes was again plotting mischief, and had made an appointment to meet at the ruined home of her victim, Colonel Morelos, the commander of the district.

He, however, cared not to go there, but sent Major Barnabe Buriel to meet his doom.

Such was the one whom Isodor had met as she came from the shadows of the orange grove and advanced with her toward the ruined villa in the shadow of which lay the dead body of the Spaniard, and where Leon De Soto stood, waiting to see what would be the outcome of the Boy Insurgent's bold plan to capture the Girl Spy, who had already done so much harm against Cubans in avenging her dead lover, Rafael Ramirez, the traitor conspirator.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ENTRAPPED.

WHEN the young girl, Fanita Fuentes, came out of the orange thicket, it was to meet the one she saw upon horseback, for she was confident that he had come there in answer to her note to Colonel Morelos, though the moonlight revealed that he wore not the Spanish uniform.

As he rode toward her she saw that his face was black.

But Fanita Fuentes was one who knew no fear, and armed as she was, she felt that she had nothing to dread.

Upon approaching near to her the disguised Cuban youth dismounted and politely raised his hat, while he asked:

"Is this the señorita who wrote a letter to my master—the Señor Colonel Morelos?"

"I am Fanita Fuentes, and I wrote a letter to Colonel Morelos," was the reply, and the girl turned her bright eyes upon the face of Isodor.

"My master sent me to see you, señorita."

"Why did he not come?"

"He had a council of officers, señorita, that prevented his coming."

"Why then did he not send an officer?"

"Major Buriel is not at head-quarters, señorita, and the Señor Master knew that he could trust me, as I owe my life and all to him."

"Ah! you seem above your station, and Colonel Morelos doubtless knows what he is about—but sent he no letter?"

"No, señorita; he told me to tell you that he got your letter, and was glad to hear from you again, and that you were no longer ill."

"I thank him."

"And the Señor Master told me to say, señorita, that what you would say to him, you could tell me."

"He trusts you well."

"Yes, señorita."

"What is your name?"

"Isodor, señorita."

"That is the name of the youth who once dwelt here."

"Yes, señorita, and I was named for him."

"After Isodor Christobal?"

"Yes, señorita, for I once dwelt here."

"Did you belong to the Christobal family?"

"Yes, señorita."

"I see, and the colonel freed you?"

"I owe to the Señor Colonel Morelos, señorita, that which I would give my life to pay," was the answer.

"I suppose I can trust you," thoughtfully said Fanita.

"Yes, señorita, I am to be trusted."

"Well, you can say to Colonel Morelos that I have discovered that the Cubans again are holding secret meetings over the island."

"Yes, señorita."

"Tell him that the man he once spared, the Señor Leon De Soto, is at the head of the League."

"Yes, señorita."

"Say to him that this secret camp is not a mile from this place, and so well concealed that no one would suspect it."

"I will, señorita."

"And more, tell him that they have arms and munitions of war hidden there."

"Yes, señorita."

"Also, that I am confident that a landing on the island is contemplated very soon, and already a suspicious vessel is off the coast to-night."

"A Cuban vessel, señorita?"

"I am sure that it is, and more, I saw a boat come ashore to-night from it, near this point."

"The vessel then stood on down the coast; but I believe matters are ripe for an uprising."

"I'll tell him, señorita."

"Say also, that the only way he can gain access to this Secret League will be by strategy."

"Yes, señorita."

"Let him have a force come here after night-fall, on Saturday night, for the League meets twice a week."

"Then let him place a spy on the track of the Señor De Soto and dog his steps here."

"By making him prisoner, much can be accomplished, and I will guide your master to the secret retreat, or rather to positions to surround it and starve out the force there, for it cannot be taken otherwise."

"Yes, señorita."

"Tell him to communicate with me, through you, in all he wishes done, for I do not wish to be seen going to the Spanish head-quarters, as the Cubans would be suspicious."

"Yes, señorita."

"You understand?"

"Yes, señorita."

"You are sure?"

"I understand all, señorita; but is that all?"

"Yes."

"Is not that some one moving there in the orange grove, señorita, or have you a friend with you?"

Fanita turned quickly, and as she did so Isodor threw his arms about her, and pinioned her hands close to her side.

She uttered a wild cry of rage and amazement commingled, and struggled hard; but the youth held her powerless to free herself, and called out:

"Quick, señor!"

With mighty bounds Leon De Soto approached the spot, and again Fanita uttered a cry, for she realized fully that she was entrapped.

Then she gave one long, piercing cry for help; but placing his hand over her mouth Leon De Soto proceeded to quickly wrap her veil about her face to serve as a gag, and this being done, he secured the reins, from the bridle of the dead Spaniard's horse, and in an instant had bound her hands securely behind her back.

"Come, señorita, you must go with us," said Isodor.

But she threw herself flat upon the ground and lay motionless.

"We must carry her, señor," said Isodor, and the two raised her in their arms, in spite of her struggles, and bore her rapidly toward the shore.

"I will take her out in my skiff," Isodor remarked, as they laid her upon the sands, and going out upon the ruined pier he soon raised his sunken skiff and ran it to the shore.

Into this they lifted the girl, and seizing his oars, while De Soto held her, for she tried to throw herself overboard, bound as she was, he rowed rapidly out of the bay and then along the shore to where the yacht lay in the lagoon.

The crew were becoming alarmed at the long stay of Isodor, as the Patriots were there loading up their last boat.

But he said, simply, without excuse, for his delay:

"Here, Seminole, help me aboard with this woman."

The Indian raised her in his strong arms, and, by Isodor's order, carried her into the cabin.

"Take the gag from her mouth, Seminole, but do not unbind her hands, and guard her securely."

"Me will," was the reply of the Indian, and seeing that the rein was very tight about her slender wrists, Isodor said:

"Untie her, Seminole, for her bonds seem to hurt her, and I feel that you can prevent her escape."

"Me will," came the low response, and a moment after Fanita sat glaring at her Indian guard, and looking as though she would like to spring upon him and kill him; but there was that about the Seminole that made her hesitate, for she had felt his great strength, as he bore her into the cabin, and she had no weapons with which to strike him, as Leon De Soto had wholly disarmed her.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CAPTIVE.

WHEN Isodor went on deck, after leaving his strange captive in charge of Seminole, he found the Cuban Patriots about to depart with the last boat-load.

He gave the dispatches he had to Leon De Soto, who promised to deliver them as addressed, received a full statement of just how matters stood, and promising to return within the shortest possible time with another cargo, offered his hand to say farewell.

"My love to Ninez, Senor Leon," he said.

"Yes, Isodor, and she will be glad to know how successfully you have done your work."

"Pray give my remembrances to your sister and say that before very long I hope to welcome her to *Cuba Libre*."

"Heaven grant it, senor."

"And, Isodor, what will you do with your captive?"

"Carry her with me, that there will be no danger of her betraying all that she knows."

"But her father?"

"Ah! I had forgotten him; come into the cabin with me and see if she will be willing to write him a letter that you will see delivered."

"Yes, I will send it to him in some way."

Entering the cabin the two friends beheld Fanita looking like a tigress at bay, as she sat near the Indian, who was stolid as ever, but watchful.

"Senorita, I have come to have a word with you," said Isodor.

She made no reply.

"That you may feel at ease, let me say that I mean you no harm; but I am equally determined that you shall do us no harm, and for that reason I shall take you on a cruise with me on the *War-Cloud*."

"That state-room and this cabin is at your service, and you will not be troubled in any way, while I pledge you my word some day I will bring you back in safety to your home in Cuba."

Still no word, and Isodor continued:

"I know that your father is getting old, and fearful that he may believe you dead, I have come to suggest that you write him a letter."

She shook her head.

"This letter," continued Isodor, "Colonel De Soto here will see reaches him, and in it you had better say you are engaged in a work that will carry you away for a few weeks, but at the end of that time he shall hear from you."

"It will relieve his mind, and save him much sorrow on your account."

"Do you think of an old man's feelings, when you are one to make a woman captive?" was the fierce question of the girl.

"Senorita, are you aware who I am?"

"Yes, I recognize you by your voice, in spite of your blackened face."

"Who am I?"

"Isodor, the Boy Insurgent."

"Yes, I am the son of the man whom you betrayed to his death, and I am revengeful, but not to a woman."

"I have made you a captive, yes, and I intend to hold you as such; but it is not from revengeful motives."

"Why then?"

"I am surprised that you ask it."

"I do ask why?"

"Because, were you free, within a few days this gentleman, Leon De Soto, and a hundred others would be sacrificed by you, for you would

inform Colonel Morelos, and death to them by the *garrote* would quickly follow.

"You know of our secret retreat, and I am determined that you shall not make it known to our foes, so I take you with me as captive, until your reports to Morelos can do us no harm."

"Now write to your father, as I suggest, that he may not suffer on your account."

"You are a strange boy, man, or whatever I can call you, for man you have certainly proven yourself."

"Give me pen and paper and I will write."

The articles were handed to her, and hastily, in a bold hand she wrote as follows:

"MY DEAR FATHER:—

"Circumstances of a most important nature will detain me from home for some time, perhaps several weeks, for I am on a duty that will prevent my returning home."

"Do not worry about me, for I am safe and well, and the very earliest moment I will come back to you."

FANITA."

This she addressed:

"TO SENOR FUENTES,

"*The Sailor Hermit,*"

and handed it to Isodor, who in turn placed it in the hand of Leon De Soto, who at once arose and took his departure, the young captain following him to the deck, and Seminole, the Indian sailor, remaining in the cabin to still guard the captive.

"Will you say that I would like to speak with the senor before he goes?" suddenly asked the girl, and Seminole arose to do her bidding, when, quick as the spring of a tigress she was upon him, shoving him headlong into a corner, and with a bound was up the companionway and overboard into the sea.

The loud splash, as she struck the waters, told Isodor and Leon De Soto what had occurred, and at that instant up the companionway bounded Seminole, and he was in the sea not ten seconds behind her.

"Quick! Keep an eye out for her from that boat!" cried Isodor, addressing the two negroes, who were waiting in the skiff to row De Soto ashore, and every eye was strained upon the water.

Soon she arose, and almost by her side, as though he had intuitively known which direction she would dive, was Seminole.

Instantly the two disappeared again, and, when they again arose the Seminole had her clasped in his strong arms.

The two negroes sent the skiff flying toward them, and the captive was taken on board.

She was panting for breath and savage; but said nothing, as Seminole again bore her into the cabin.

"I breathe freely again, now that she is once more your captive, Isodor," said De Soto, as he grasped the youth's hand in farewell, and sprung into the skiff.

"I will set you ashore, Leon, while you, boys, get the anchor up and sail on the schooner as quickly as possible, as we have only an hour and a half of darkness left," and Isodor took the oars.

"Senor, be good enough to do me a favor," he said as they reached the shore.

"Yes, Isodor."

"Here is a sword that has my name upon it, and I beg you to take it to the spot where Major Buriel lies and leave it."

"You wish the Spaniards to know that you are his slayer?"

"Yes, I wish them to know that I am still on the track of revenge."

"I will do it," said Leon De Soto, and he kept his word, arriving home just at dawn, and getting his horse, and the one Isodor had ridden, back in their stalls, just before dawn, and without discovery.

In the mean time, the *War-Cloud* was flying seaward under a seven-knot breeze, and when the sun arose the island of Cuba was leagues astern.

CHAPTER XX.

A STORY OF CRIME.

"SENOR, I would know what my fate is to be?"

It was Fanita Fuentes who spoke, and she addressed her question to Isodor Christobal, who stood upon the deck of his yacht, his eyes eagerly glancing to catch the first sight of land, for it was some days after leaving Cuba, and the island retreat of the Cuban Patriots must soon come in view.

It was near the sunset hour, the wind was balmy and free, and the *War-Cloud* was slipping along over the waters, her black crew for-

ward, Bueno seated amidships, and Seminole at the helm.

"Senorita, your fate is to return to Cuba, as soon as we accomplish a certain purpose and you can do us no harm," returned Isodor.

"Senor Isodor, I would wish to do you no harm; but oh! that you knew the feeling of revenge as I know it, and you would not blame me," she said, with great earnestness.

"Senorita Fuentes, few feel deeper revenge in their hearts than I do; but I make this discrimination, not to strike the innocent for the guilty."

"As you have spoken upon this subject, let me continue it and say that you acted madly, for you sought to strike without knowledge of who had wronged you, for you considered yourself wronged, while I deem that a favor was done you in preventing you from becoming united to the man you loved."

"I liked Rafael Ramirez greatly, and, though warned against his friendship by those who knew him best, I still clung to him."

"It was I that asked him to ally himself as a Cuban with the Patriot cause, and he became one of our League, I trusting him where others doubted."

"What was his return for that trust in him? He sought to betray us, not from hatred—for his interests were allied with us and with Cuba—but he betrayed us for gold!"

"He sold out his home, his kindred, his friends, for gold, and to gain that he was willing to see brave men perish."

"It was I that saw him in his secret interview with Captain Merida, and it was I that informed upon him."

"My father, and not one of those who were murdered with him, ever knew of his treachery, for I gave the order for his execution!"

"You!"

"Yes, senorita, for he was tried, by our law of protection, and sentenced to death."

"But did he gain this gold through treachery to you?" and her voice was barely audible.

"He received one payment of gold and would have received more, had he not been slain; but to prove to you that he could be treacherous to you also, as well as to us, I will ask you if he had not asked you to become his wife?"

"Yes."

"Are you aware that he was already married?"

"No! no! no! it is false!"

"It is true."

"You have no proof of this."

"I have."

"I defy you to show it."

"Do you see yonder dark speck dead ahead, senorita?"

"Yes."

"It is land."

"Well?"

"It is the free land of America, an island off the mainland."

"Well?"

"Upon that island are a number of Cuban patriots, and vast quantities of arms and stores, awaiting transportation to Cuba."

"What has that to do with Rafael Ramirez?"

"Among those patriots is a young man who was once a rich planter in Cuba."

"I care not for him."

"He knew Rafael Ramirez, and they were as brothers in the eyes of the world."

"Well?"

"Rafael Ramirez led him into dissipation, to gambling, and day by day won from him his inheritance until he had gotten all."

"Is this true?"

"It is not the worst."

"Go on!"

"The young man had a lovely sister, who devotedly loved Rafael Ramirez."

"Ah!"

"He soon squandered the fortune he had won from her brother and forbidden the house by him, he urged the sister to fly with him."

"She did so, they were married in Havana—"

"It is false!"

"They were married in Havana."

"I say it is false!" almost shrieked the woman.

"It is true, for he not only married her, but fled to America with her and there deserted her, while he returned to Cuba."

"Her brother had followed them, and, after a while found his sister living in wretched poverty."

"He had intended to kill Ramirez, but she urged him not to do so, and the two remained in America, gaining what work they could to support them, and then, longing to get home, back to Cuba, where they hoped to save something

from their wrecked fortunes, they volunteered among the other Cuban Patriots, the girl cutting off her hair and in man's attire passing as such.

"One day an old friend recognized the brother, knew the history of both, and told General Lopez, who at once placed the poor woman under the care of noble Cuban ladies in New Orleans, where she now is, while her brother, a Patriot officer, is on yonder island, and will vouch for all that I have told you, so that you can see how vile was the man you loved, and for whom you sacrificed so many splendid lives.

"Now, senorita, you know all, and I can only say that if I carry you back to Cuba with me when I return in a few days, it will be to make you serve me well."

"I will never do it," she said harshly.

"Oh, yes, you will, I think."

"Never! for, though you may have told the truth about Rafael Ramirez, you took his life, by your own confession—"

"I ordered his execution."

"It is the same thing, and never will I do one act to serve you."

"We will see, senorita," quietly said Isodor, and he turned away, leaving the girl to her own thoughts, and bitter indeed they were.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE RETURN CRUISE.

It was an hour after nightfall, when the War-Cloud ran into the little island harbor and dropped anchor.

Isodor went ashore at once, leaving the captive still under the charge of Seminole.

He reported his arrival to the commandant of the Patriot forces on the island, and having told him to get another cargo ready, he started with Bueno in a small sail-boat to go to New Orleans, to communicate with the Cuban Junta.

Running up the lake, he landed at the home of an old fisherman that Bueno knew, and securing a horse and cart drove to New Orleans.

He visited the head-quarters of the Junta, and surprised them while in council.

At sight of him they gave a cheer and all sprung to their feet, Colonel Crittenden grasping his hand warmly, and saying hurriedly:

"Your sister is well, for I saw her but yesterday."

In a few words Isodor reported the result of his cruise, how he had found the Patriots preparing for the uprising, his fatal meeting with Major Barnabe Buriel, and the capture of Fanita.

"That girl deserves death," sternly said one.

"Yes, she must die," remarked another.

"It is a fearful thing to have to put a woman to death, but she caused the Spaniards to murder a number of our noble comrades, led them against our hiding-places, and prevented the blow from being struck that would certainly have freed Cuba."

"She must die."

"Ay, she shall!"

Such were the threatening words that ran around the circle, as the Patriots dwelt upon the enormity of Fanita's crimes.

"Senors, I am sorry to hear you speak as you do, for I am not one to see a woman put to death, whatever her crime may have been," said Isodor sternly.

"You cannot save her, Senor Isodor, through your kindness of heart," said one of the Junta.

"You certainly are not in earnest, when you say that she must die?" Isodor remarked.

"Assuredly, for I shall send word to the Island to have her executed by the garrote at once."

"What say you, senors?" and the Junta's chief turned to his fellow officials.

All bowed in acquiescence, when Isodor, springing to his feet cried earnestly:

"Senors, I yield to you, yes, in all that pertains to my duty as a Cuban Patriot; but I captured Fanita Fuentes, and I told her no harm should befall her, and it shall not."

"Boy, do you dare go against the will of the Junta?" sternly said the President.

"Ay do I, when it is to put a woman to death, and I say it shall not be!"

Every Cuban was on his feet in an instant, and dark looks were turned upon the youth.

"Senors, it was my father whom that woman's act caused to be murdered, and I have suffered more than any of you who stand here, ay, and I have risked my life in Cuba's cause more than has this august Junta," but I say, and I mean it, that better Cuba remain under the Spanish yoke, than stain her fair name with the murder of a woman.

"No, senors, it cannot, it shall not be."

It was evident that Isodor had offended the Junta deeply by his fiery words, and that there

was going to be trouble all saw, when Duke Crittenden, who had calmly kept his seat, now arose and said in his deep-toned voice and impressive way:

"Senors, I offer my resignation at once, if you are determined to press this matter, and do that which would well become the Spaniard known as Atares, the Butcher."

A look of amazement rested upon the faces of those who had urged the execution of Fanita, and they were becoming black with passion at being bearded in their own quarters, when General Lopez said:

"Senors of the Junta, my sword shall also be sheathed, if you urge this disgrace to come upon us, for I will not advance one step to defend Cuba, when her bright name is stained with a woman's blood."

The members of the Junta saw that they had gone too far, and that they must withdraw from their position, so, in a few well-chosen remarks the President said that, blinded by passion and grief they had urged that which in their thoughtful moments could never have held place in their hearts, and that Captain Christobal was free to do with his captive as he deemed best.

Isodor bowed, and oil had been poured upon the troubled waters.

Then it was decided that Isodor should take another cargo to the island, make known to Colonel Leon De Soto that all was in readiness for the uprising, and upon his next voyage he would be accompanied by the yacht Red Belt, and both vessels would be loaded down with gallant Patriots, come to strike the blow that would free their loved Cuba.

An hour after Isodor was on his way once more to the Island Retreat, and the following night the War-Cloud set sail on the second coming to the Ever Faithful Isle, and in her cabin, still a captive, was Fanita the Hermitess, who had seen the brother of the maiden whom Rafael Ramirez had made his wife, heard his story of the cruel treatment his sister had received at the hands of the treacherous Cuban, and, with a heart that was well-nigh breaking, the revengeful girl cared not what fate awaited her at the hands of her foes.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SAILOR HERMIT.

AGAIN is the daring little yacht approaching the coast of Cuba.

It is night, and the dark shores loom up forebodingly before the eyes of those who stand upon her deck.

They are but few, the same who once before ran the desperate gantlet in the cause of Cuba Libre.

They are Isodor Christobal and his crew of slaves, with Seminole, the Indian sailor.

The one exception is Fanita Fuentes.

She sits alone in the cabin, for Isodor has asked her to go there a half hour before, as he does not know what she may do.

He fears to trust her, for a wild cry for help might reach the ear of some one, and spoil all.

"Will you go in-shore in the yacht, Senor Master?" asked Bueno, who stood at the helm.

"Yes, for we can hide there, while lying off here may attract attention."

"Head for the lagoon, and call me if the signal agreed upon is displayed from Rock Hill."

So saying, Isodor descended to the cabin, having motioned to the Seminole to stand at the companionway.

Fanita sat in an easy seat, her eyes fixed upon vacancy.

Her face was very beautiful, yet very stern, and she looked also sad.

"Senorita, we are within a league of Cuba," said Isodor.

"And within two leagues of my home, that means."

"Yes."

"I hope I will find my father well."

"I hope so, for your sake, that he is well."

"But, senorita, I have come to speak to you upon an important matter."

"Yes."

"I wish to have your father come here."

"On board this yacht?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"That I will explain after he has come; but I now wish you to write him a line."

"What shall I say?"

"Ask him to come here."

"He may not be at home."

"Oh, yes, for he never remains away, and I saw a light in his cabin."

"You were looking to see?"

"Yes, I was searching the shores for lights, and saw his."

"Are you sure?"

"I know this coast, senorita, better than I do your face."

"Well, what do you wish?"

"That you will ask your father to come here."

"You mean him no harm?"

"Have my actions toward you proven that I do?"

"No."

"Then write as I dictate, please."

She turned to the table, and picking up a pen, wrote after Isodor's dictation:

"FATHER:—I have returned to Cuba, after a forced absence of some time.

"I cannot now come home, so wish you to come to me.

"The bearer of this will guide you.

"I will explain when I see you.

"FANITA."

"Thank you," and Isodor walked on deck.

"Seminole, watch her as you would a wild beast," he said, and the Indian entered the cabin.

"Bueno, I will take the helm while you get the skiff ready, for I wish you to go to the home of the Hermit Sailor."

"Yes, Senor Master."

"Give him this letter, and say that he is to follow you."

"Yes, senor."

Isodor then took the helm, and kept the yacht headed for the lagoon, while Bueno got the skiff ready, and, as the War-Cloud moved into the mouth of the inlet, he put the light craft overboard and rowed swiftly away in the darkness.

Upon the prow of Rock Hill a blue light was visible, and this told the youth that all was safe for him to venture in.

Hardly had the anchor been lowered into the water when a boat ran out of the dark shadows of the shore and came alongside.

Instantly it was covered by half-dozen muskets, held in the hands of the black crew, while Isodor said sternly:

"Ahoy! who are you?"

"The War-Cloud," and Leon De Soto sprang on board.

The greeting between the two friends was a warm one, and De Soto said:

"I was riding with Ninez this afternoon, and saw your sail a long way off, so after dark came to Rock Hill, and here I am to greet you."

"Is all well, senor?"

"Yes."

"And Colonel Morelos?"

"Is behaving like an enraged tiger, for he has arrested several on suspicion."

"But has no trace of your retreat?"

"None."

"And the League still exists in good shape?"

"Yes; and there are two hundred men in the retreat, while all that we can trust are warned to be ready to rally at an instant's notice."

"Good! and I have brought you even a more valuable cargo than before."

"That is grand; but, Isodor, Morelos was wild about the death of Major Barnabe Buriel."

"Indeed!"

"He came himself to the villa to look after him, as he did not return, and found him lying there dead, with your sword by his side."

"It doubtless showed him that an avenger was on the track of the brutal Spaniards who treat us like wild beasts."

"Indeed it did; and though he tried to keep Buriel's death a secret, it leaked out, and you are known on the island now as the Weird Avenger."

"I hope to do other work that will hurt them, and, Senor Leon, my next aim shall be Morelos."

"But how can you get at him?"

"I have a little plan I will soon make known to you."

"And the girl?"

"I brought her back with me."

"You do not intend to set her free?"

"Ah, no, but to make her useful."

"You would not trust her?"

"Not even in my sight."

"I am glad to hear that; but tell me of your sister."

"I did not see her this time; but Colonel Crittenden told me she was well."

Leon De Soto sighed, and Isodor asked:

"And your parents and Ninez?"

"Are well, while Ninez begged hard to come with me."

"It is better not; but there come the boats, so we will begin to unload."

The boats, lowered from Rock Hill cliff, now came alongside of the yacht, and the crews be-

gan to unload the little vessel of her precious cargo.

As fast as they had their load, they were taken to the derrick ropes and drawn up to the cliffs, where nimble hands then carried their freight to the tents.

Thus a couple of hours passed, and the work of discharging the cargo was nearly finished, when the skiff ran alongside and Bueno sprung on board, accompanied by a large man with a long, gray beard and hair.

Isodor met him at the side and said:

"The Senor Fuentes?"

"Yes; and you are the Senor Isodor Christobal?" was the reply.

"I am."

"You have won a great name in Cuba, senor, though you count your years as few."

"And you are in sympathy with Cuba, Senor Fuentes?"

"I am."

"I cannot trust him any more than I can his daughter," said Isodor, as he turned to Leon De Soto and bade him come with him and the Hermit Sailor into the cabin.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BROUGHT TO TERMS.

THE meeting between the father and daughter was an affecting one, for Isodor called Seminole on deck, and allowed the Sailor Hermit to enter alone.

Then he followed, accompanied by Leon De Soto, Major Concha, the Cuban commandante of Rock Hill, Bueno and Seminole.

The father and daughter turned as the others entered, and the former said sternly:

"Senor Christobal, what does this mean?"

"In a word, senor, it means that your daughter loved a villain, Rafael Ramirez, a man who was already married, and who, though a Cuban, was a traitor."

"He attempted to sell us out to the Spaniards, his treachery was discovered, and I ordered him executed."

"Your daughter, in revenge, knowing Ramirez' secrets, gave them to Colonel Morelos, who, you know, had my father and twelve other gallant Patriots, executed by the *garrote*, and this information the Spanish officer received from Senorita Fanita also prevented our striking a blow for Cuba months ago."

"Again I discovered, when last on the island, that the Senorita Fanita had made an appointment with Colonel Morelos, to again sell us out."

"Major Barnabe Buriel came to meet her, but found me instead, and I met your daughter and made her my captive."

"Now, I am determined that she shall do some good for Cuba, and I therefore sent for you."

"Well, senor?" answered the Sailor Hermit, who had listened in stern silence to all that had been said.

"I wish to meet Colonel Morelos, and I desire that your daughter write him a letter that I dictate."

"I will not do it," she said firmly.

"She is her own mistress, senor," the Hermit Sailor remarked.

"I desire that you write Colonel Morelos a letter, senorita," calmly continued Isodor.

"I will not."

"Then, senorita, your father's life be upon your hands."

"What do you mean?" gasped the girl.

"Seminole, put that man in double irons," and Isodor pointed to the old sailor.

He seemed about to resist, but Seminole and Bueno were upon him in an instant, and he was quickly handcuffed, while Fanita, who sprung to his aid was seized by Isodor and Leon De Soto.

"Senorita, I wish you to take a pen and write as I dictate."

"If you refuse, I shall have your father shot within half an hour."

The words were uttered in a tone that admitted of no doubt of the intention of the Weird Avenger, and Fanita gave a cry of terror.

"Senor Fuentes, I believe you to be at heart a Cuban, and that your daughter would like to see the patriots rule this island, but is carried away by revenge, and forgets her patriotism."

"If she writes as I dictate, I will free both of you upon my next visit to Cuba, which will be in a very short while, for there is a blow pending that must soon fall."

"If she refuses, I will have you executed, as I said, and it remains with her to save your life."

The old Hermit did not flinch, but turned to his daughter.

She gazed an instant upon the face of Isodor, and then said:

"I will write as you wish."

Then Isodor said slowly:

"TO COLONEL CAZANDRA MORELOS:—"

"SENOR:—I have been of late engaged upon a session that has detained me to such an extent that I was unable to communicate with you."

"Your messenger, Major Buriel, came to the villa, and when I arrived I found him dead, so I made good my retreat."

"I now know the hiding-places of the Cubans, and that within two weeks a blow will be struck to wrest the island from Spain."

"To you alone will I give my information, and, as I do not wish to be seen, meet me at the Villa Vista to-morrow afternoon at an hour before sunset, *but come alone*, as I will not be known, even to your staff, as taking sides against Cuba."

"You know my motive is revenge; but my death would follow quickly, for I am in the confidence of the Cubans, and write this from their midst."

"Come and send word by the bearer of this if I may expect you."

FANITA."

This letter Isodor folded up, had the girl address it, and giving it to Seminole told him to find his way with it to the Spanish headquarters, and that Colonel De Soto would direct him.

Then he was to return to the vicinity of Villa Vista and wait until the next afternoon in the ruin, and he would join him there.

"Now, Bueno, stand out to sea with the yacht, and I am sorry to have to put the senorita also in irons, but it must be."

"To-morrow night run inshore to within a league and if I am alive I will come out in my skiff."

"If not, then Senor De Soto will do so," and soon after the War-Cloud, with her two prisoners in the cabin, was standing seaward, the Seminole was going toward the Spanish headquarters, accompanied a short distance by Leon De Soto, and Isodor had returned with Major Concha to the retreat of the Cuban Patriots on the summit of Rock Hill.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE WEIRD AVENGER.

WHEN the dawn was near at hand, Isodor left the retreat of Rock Hill, was lowered to the water in his skiff, and wended his way toward the ruined Villa.

The sun was rising as he reached the ruin, and he made his way into one of the wings and calmly lay down to rest until the coming of the Seminole.

Falling to sleep, for he was very tired, he slept until he was awakened by a step near him.

Glancing from his retreat beneath the walls, he beheld the Indian sailor, and instantly gave a low whistle.

It was answered by the Seminole, and Isodor stepped out of his retreat.

"Well, Seminole, you are back?" he said quickly.

"Yes."

"You saw Colonel Morelos?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"Give me this," and he handed him an envelope.

It was sealed, but breaking it Isodor read:

"I have worried a great deal over the mysterious disappearance of my beautiful spy, and am happy to know of her still being at work for me."

"I shall come to the Villa, as she requests, though it is a spot I like not to visit; but I expect to glean information by coming, which will more than repay me for the pangs of conscience it will cause."

There was no address, no signature; but Isodor recognized the writing of Colonel Morelos, which he had often seen.

"You have done well, Seminole."

"Thank you."

"Now we will lie in wait here for the coming of Morelos, and you must meet him and lead him in here."

"Yes."

"Did he question you?"

"Yes, ask me if I was kin to Fanita."

"Tell him was her uncle."

"Good! did you get any news?"

"Yes, read paper layin' on desk."

"It have names of many, and read:

"Captain Barrios will arrest at their homes on the night of the twelfth, the following Cuban conspirators, and convey them to the Death Prison to await execution for treason."

"Did you see the names of any of them?" quickly asked Isodor.

"See one I know."

"Whose was it?"

"Leon De Soto."

"Ha! this is news!"

"Father name too, I guess."

"Poor old man, he is as innocent of con-

spiracy as a child; but they would put him to death without mercy."

"Seminole?"

"Yes."

"You must go to the home of the De Sotos; it lies in the forest, half a league from here."

"See Colonel De Soto and tell him just what you saw."

"Tell him to prepare to leave on the yacht to-night, with his parents and sister, and to drive to the Eagle Point, which is near his home, as soon as it gets dark, with what baggage they can take with them."

"Say that I will have the boats there to meet them, and convey them on board the War-Cloud."

"I wish I knew the names of others that are doomed."

"Try to remember, but do not."

"You have done well as it is, Seminole; but now be off, for to-morrow night is the one appointed for the arrest."

"Now I will go and signal Major Concha to send the boats as soon as it is dark."

The Indian sailor walked away, following Isodor's directions, while the youth made his way to the lagoon where his skiff was sunk, raised it, and soon was in front of the cliff.

A signal caused a face to peer over the cliff, and asking to see Major Concha, that officer soon after appeared.

In a voice, raised as loud as he dared, Isodor told him to send the boats to Eagle Point after dark, and then he hastily rowed back to the lagoon.

As the afternoon was gliding rapidly away he did not again sink the skiff, but hastened back to the ruin.

Hardly had he reached it before Seminole appeared.

"Well?"

"See him, tell him, and all right."

"Glad to know, and will leave with old folks and sister."

"Seminole you are a treasure."

"Now go out and wait for the coming of Colonel Morelos."

"Bring him in here and *come behind him*, for when he sees me he will draw a revolver, and I do not wish to have a shot fired."

"He must meet me with his sword."

"Me understand," and the Indian sailor left the ruin.

Soon after Isodor heard the tramp of hoofs, then silence followed, and next came a firm step upon the pavement in front of the Villa, while Seminole said:

"Fanita in there."

The Spanish officer strode boldly into the hallway of the ruin, to be suddenly confronted by the Weird Avenger.

He uttered a cry of alarm, and his hand dropped upon his pistol, but, quick as a flash Seminole disarmed him, and Isodor confronted him with his Diamond Cutlass.

"Colonel Morelos, we are well met, and I entrapped you here that it might be your life or mine."

"I seek retribution, so draw and fight for your coward life."

The blades clashed with a ring that made the sparks fly; but Isodor pressed the Spaniard so hard that he had to retreat against the wall, and, unnerved, perhaps, by the surprise, he did not fight with the vim that the youth had expected, for in less than a minute Colonel Morelos fell before the revengeful young Cuban, who said:

"Thus do I avenge the wrongs you have done me."

Calling to Seminole to follow him, he walked rapidly down to the shore, for the sun had set, and night was coming on.

An hour after the War-Cloud ran in, the boats sent to Eagle Point came alongside with De Soto, his parents and Ninez, and long before midnight the fleet yacht was flying across the Gulf, the young Cuban planter having refused to accompany his parents and remained to cast his lot with the Patriots.

CHAPTER XXV.

CONCLUSION.

WHEN Isodor had left the ruin he had believed Colonel Morelos to be dead; but the Spaniard rallied soon after, staggered to his feet, reached his horse and mounting, though with the greatest difficulty, rode away.

The animal carried him on the way homeward, until the wounded man fell from his saddle, just as a volante was near, containing some Spanish ladies.

He was taken up by the driver and driven to the town, where aid was called, and it became a

question for days whether Colonel Morelos would live or die.

In the mean time the War Cloud had returned to the American shores, a landing was made at night, of the De Leon family, at the home of Isodor, and they received a warm welcome from Estrella, who, in her loneliness was most happy to have those with her who had been her friends.

Then to the Island Retreat went the War-Cloud, and there she found the Red Belt, for all was ready for the invasion of the Island of Cuba.

Loaded down with Patriots, the two yachts set sail on their dangerous mission.

Separated in a storm, the Red Belt landed upon the western shore of Cuba, through the treacherous advice of some one in authority, when she should have gone to the eastern shore, where all was ripe and ready for the uprising of the claus.

Hemmed in by Spanish soldiers, the Patriot band was forced to submit, and General Lopez and Colonel Crittenden, with a hundred of their followers, were led to execution, dying as brave men, and the young American standing with fearless face and smiling mien until the Spanish bullets pierced his heart.

The War-Cloud meanwhile went to the old rendezvous, to find that the Rock Hill Retreat had been discovered, and Colonel De Soto was most gallantly defending himself in the Villa Vista, against a large force of the enemy.

News having come of the capture of Lopez and Crittenden, and that the cause was lost, Leon De Soto was preparing to die like a brave when man, with his two score of followers, into the little bay ran the War-Cloud, two pieces of artillery were turned upon the Spaniards, and landing with his force, Isodor, the Weird Avenger, made a desperate charge to the rescue of his friend.

Across the lawn they went, beating the Spaniards back, and beholding them, Leon De Soto made a sortie to meet them, and then it became a desperate fight back to the shore.

But the boats were reached, and though two-thirds of the Patriots fell, and both Isodor and Leon De Soto were wounded, the War-Cloud's decks were gained and he spread her white sails and fled from the land of Cuba.

Not daring to run into Mobile, Isodor sailed for a northern port, the cargo was buried on a point on the American coast, the War-Cloud was laid up in a quiet little harbor, and the Cuban band scattered about the United States, to await another call to arms for *Cuba Libre*.

With Leon De Soto, Isodor returned to his home in Mobile Bay and the sad news was told.

Poor Estrella bore the death of her lover bravely, and, as time went by, won by the devotion of Leon De Soto she became his wife, for in the misfortunes that befell her, he had proven himself all that man could be to woman.

And after years had passed away, Isodor won a young heart, that of Ninez De Soto, and in their quiet home in America those who knew and loved them, little dreamed that the handsome, stern-faced young Cuban had ever been known as the Weird Avenger of the Ever Faithful Isle, and had done deeds of daring no man could surpass while commander of his beautiful yacht the War-Cloud.

THE END.

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